Multiple readings in multiple choice reading tests: A study of year 11 students' reading practices of a multiple choice reading test

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MULTIPLE READINGS IN MULTIPLE CHOICE READING TESTS -
A STUDY OF YEAR 11 STUDENTS’ READING
PRACTICES OF A MULTIPLE CHOICE READING TEST

BY

Rosemary Naughton, Dip. Teach., B.Ed.

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of

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at the Faculty of Education, Edith Cowan University

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ABSTRACT

This study examines students' responses to the questions in a multiple choice reading test. An analysis of the processes students used to negotiate meaning revealed the roles played by cognitive strategies and cultural framing in shaping students' responses to multiple choice questions.

A descriptive/analytical study methodology was conducted with a group of forty eight Year 11 students in the final term of the school year. These students represented four mixed sex ability groupings and a range of socio-economic backgrounds. Think-Out-Loud protocols were used in an interview situation. Students responded to thirty four questions from three passages selected from multiple choice reading tests used in statewide examinations for Western Australian Tertiary Entrance in subject English. Students' responses were transcribed and then analysed. In addition, the passages, questions and answers from the test were analysed to determine the different reading positions made available through the questions and possible answers. The data were triangulated with results from statewide examination results, observations and debriefing sessions with member checkers. Results indicated that the methods and strategies used by students in their attempts to negotiate the correct answer helped them only when students aligned their readings with the readings privileged by the item writers.
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate, without my acknowledgement, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature of Candidate: [Redacted]

Date: 15/2/96
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to acknowledge the assistance given to me by Judith Rivalland in the supervision of this thesis. Her advice and enthusiasm have been greatly appreciated. I also wish to thank my family for their encouragement, especially my husband Peter who has been extremely supportive.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

INTRODUCTION

This study sought to analyse the processes students move through when reading the passages, questions and possible answers in a multiple choice reading test. The methods and strategies used by the students in the process of determining correct answers and the degree of alignment with the readings privileged by the item writers were a central focus of the study. The following discussion provides a context for the research.

Background to the Problem

Over recent years reading theorists have acknowledged the importance of the social construction of knowledge in shaping how readers make meanings of texts (Lee, 1991; Luke, 1993; 1994; Kress, 1985), whereas past theorists have engaged in debates about the degree to which cognitive ability is required in becoming a successful reader (Venesky 1984; Singer, 1985; Robeck & Wallace, 1990; Robinson, Faraone, Hittleman & Unruh, 1990). The degree to which cognitive processing of information is dependent on the socio-cultural shaping of readers has, until recent years, been given scant attention in reading research. The impact of social theory has however, enabled many changes to occur in the processes and content used in teaching literacy.

As the beliefs about what constitutes literacy in schooling have changed, so too have language syllabi in secondary schools. Present syllabus documents and National
Outcome Statements advocate the importance of context in shaping meaning. Students are encouraged to understand that the various meanings of texts are shaped by their own values; the historical, social, political and cultural contexts which surround the production of the text, as well as the context in which a text is read. However in Western Australia, although teachers are urged to use these new syllabi and National Outcome Statements, twenty percent of the English paper used to assess students in the final year of schooling, is based on a multiple choice test. Assessment of reading using the multiple choice format, assumes there is only one sustainable answer because the reader is restricted to the selection of one answer. Such testing has not kept up with the movement of aligning the syllabus with reading theory. Using such a test in an examination which makes decisions about the critical literacy of students, and also their future direction regarding paid employment or university entrance, highlights not only the incongruency which exists between the syllabus and assessment procedures, but the possibilities of social injustice which arise when students do not align their meanings with the preferred meanings of item writers.

My own experience with the students I have prepared for Tertiary Entrance Examinations (TEE) and discussions held with colleagues about student performance have revealed how some students with apparently excellent comprehension skills score poorly, and some weaker students achieve much higher results in multiple choice reading tests than the predictions of their teachers. Teachers find themselves in a difficult position. On one hand they must attempt to enact the spirit of the syllabus by encouraging students to challenge dominant readings of texts; on the other hand they must prepare their students for the multiple choice section of the paper by asking them to locate what is designated as one sustainable reading for each item in the test. These contradictory practices not only appear to confuse many of the students but place the teachers in a position where they appear to lack credibility with those in their charge.
Such irreconcilable practices led to the need for further investigation into the appropriateness of multiple choice testing as a part of the assessment of comprehension in the TEE examination.

The purpose of the study was to analyse the methods and strategies students used to attain correct answers. Major considerations of the study were to ascertain whether the use of highly ordered cognitive skills enabled students to get more answers correct in a multiple choice reading test or whether the students' own schemata positioned them more strongly into selecting particular answers. It was therefore important that students from a range of socio-economic backgrounds were included, and that those selected were close to the age at which students sit the TEE examination in Western Australia. My own observations and those of my colleagues had also suggested that multiple choice questions tended to be more problematic for girls than boys. As well, our experience led us to believe that some of the more critical readers did not necessarily perform well in multiple choice tests. For this reason it was envisaged that areas of investigation would enable some comment to be made about the performances between differently graded students and differences in gender.

Hence this study sought to build on the social theory underpinning the theories of reading. The importance of connecting the social domain of reading to the highly ordered cognitive skills required to read critically, was considered crucial to the investigation. Psycholinguists (Brown, 1980; Irwin 1991) stress the importance of metacognition in reading but only make subtle links with the idea that the way readers process information itself is socially constructed. Bruner's work (1974) suggests, however, that the thinking patterns of different cultures are socially shaped, and that different cultural groups may in fact draw different conclusions about the same content, as they usually have available to them only the scriptual frames constructed by the
dominant ideology of their specific cultural groups. Thus this study set out to demonstrate the interdependent relationship between the cognitive and social domains of reading. It is recognised that the sample size of students interviewed limits broad generalisations of results. However, the quantity of the data, the richness of analysis and the triangulation of data allow for transferability of results.

**Research Questions**

The following discussion about the research questions provides an understanding of the framework underpinning the study.

The research questions highlight the complex relationship which exists between reader, writer and text, and the incongruency between multiple choice reading tests, current reading theory and teaching pedagogy. To understand this complex relationship, and to explore the mismatch between the theory supporting the syllabus and the theory which underpins the test, it was necessary to investigate how students arrived at their preferred choices and to analyse the methods and strategies they used to negotiate meaning.

The research questions provided a starting point for data collection and analysis, and research methodology.

**Major Research Question**

- What methods and strategies were used by students when reading a multiple choice reading test?
Subsidiary Questions

• How did the methods and strategies vary between the differently graded students?
• Were there differences in the methods and strategies used by male and female students as they attempted to locate the correct answer?

Because the social theory underpinning the study acknowledges that literacy practices vary between different groups, it was decided to include as wide a range of students as possible in the sample. Although a range of students is represented in the study it was too difficult to select these students on the basis of ethnicity or socioeconomic status, as the ethnic and socio-economic differences could not be controlled in the sample. Because of these restrictions, it was decided to frame the research questions around the differences between differently graded students and differences in gender.

Another area of investigation emerged during data analysis which resulted in a major focus of the study and is therefore included in the discussion of results.

Question/Answer Relationships

After beginning my investigation of the multiple choice reading practices of students, it became apparent that the issue was far more complex than I had previously thought. The way students negotiated meaning appeared to be indicated through the meanings available to them from four different sources: the text of the passage, the text of the questions, the text of the possible answers and the relationship between the questions and the possible answers (from here on referred to as question/answer
relationships). The approach students took to question/answer relationships appeared to be highly significant in determining how they selected their answers, and this issue connected closely to the major and subsidiary research questions. The relationship between the questions and the possible answers therefore became a central focus of the study.

**Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because, if the data suggest such a strong relationship between the social domain and cognitive domains of reading then the educational implications are that:

- educational authorities need to investigate the suitability of testing comprehension in the TEE using the multiple choice format,
- teachers are being positioned to act against syllabus documentation in order to prepare students for this section of the examination,
- students are being confused by daily practices and assessment procedures put in place by educational authorities,
- issues of social injustice are embedded into assessment procedures, which reinforce the marginalisation of minority groups and those who think differently from the preferred readings of the item writers, who set the tests.

It was therefore crucial to investigate the reading practices used by students when sitting multiple choice reading tests, in order to draw attention to the complex nature of reading and the unsuitability of the multiple choice format in assessing students’ comprehension abilities.
**Organisation of Thesis**

Chapter Two reviews the literature on reading theories. Chapter Three details the methodology for the study in which the theoretical framework, sample and data collection procedures are outlined and discussed. Chapter Four explains the design of the study. Chapter Five discusses how the data were analysed. Chapter Six details the results of the study and is divided into sections which discuss the possible meanings of the passages; the question/answer relationships; differences between the graded students; differences in gender and case studies of selected students. Chapter Seven draws conclusions from the results and suggests implications, limitations and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In order to investigate the mismatch between reading theory and the testing of reading comprehension, using the multiple choice format, it is necessary to review the literature about the nature of reading comprehension. In the past, reading theories stressed the role of memory and rote learning in making meaning and rendered invisible, the polemic possibilities of text interpretation. Reading theories today acknowledge the interactive nature of reading but differ in degree of endorsement of the role social shaping of readers plays in the making of meaning in texts. By juxtaposing the historical construction and theoretical positions of past and present reading theories and their impact on classroom teaching and the testing of reading, a deeper understanding can be gained about the incongruent practices which operate daily in educational institutions.

Past Reading Theories

Throughout the history of reading there have been many theories to explain the way people read. The role of memory, eye movement, oral reading, word recognition, intelligence testing, psycholinguistics and socio-cultural theory have all played a role in determining how people read.

The earliest models emphasised the role of oral reading, rote memorisation, spelling and pronunciation (Webster (1783); Staniford (1815); Swan (1844, 1847);

Robinson et al. (1990) outline the earliest thinking about reading theory. They assert there were three main time frames before 1910. Prior to 1826 the Meromiter Model which focussed on Noah Webster's (1783) work insisted that successful oral reading reinforced memory of a text and the word components of it. Because books were scarce and written words were not always available, most children learnt to read by reciting poems and memorising prayers. Spelling and word recognition were tantamount to competent reading skills; children were urged to readily pronounce words at sight to facilitate reading. Webster's dictionary, published in 1828, assisted students and untrained teachers, in negotiating meaning of words and thus brought the notion of universality of meaning into focus.

The importance of rote memorisation was investigated by Staniford in 1815. He made the assumption that if learners could memorise content then they would understand the meaning of the content. A good memory was therefore privileged in educational institutions at this time; being able to recite accurately and read orally meant mastery of the text. If you did not have a good memory you would most likely fail under the rules of this system.

Between 1826 and 1882 two similar models evolved. The Interlocking Model questioned the theory behind the Meromiter model. Criticism was levelled at the use of spellers and the rigidity of a cathetical approach. Theorists began to see the need to make reading more meaningful to children and wished to de-emphasise the role of memory. Silent reading was encouraged to aid comprehension. Teachers used pictures
with words to assist meaning making. This model developed by Davis in 1839 emphasised three steps to the reading process: rhetorical reading (oral), intellectual reading (silent reading for meaning) and mechanical reading (sight words, decoding, oral reading exercises). It acknowledged the central role of meaning in reinforcing mechanics, as well as expressive reading.

The Step by Step Model - (1826 -1882) developed at the same time as the interlocking method. It endorsed the views of Davis but questioned his emphasis on the testing of sight words. Swan (c1844, 1847 cited in Robinson et al. 1990) questioned whether teaching children a number of familiar words had anything to do with enabling them to pronounce more words. He asserted it had more to do with the child’s memory. The step-by-step model included the same components as the interlocking model but insisted there were hierarchical steps that must be followed. Firstly children had to learn the power of the letters, then the words. Many educators supported Swan’s views and this heralded the arrival of teaching phonics in schools.

Between 1883 - 1910, the Thought-Getting Model was developed. Parker (1883) stressed the importance of the experiential background of the reader in the reading process. Teachers at this time were encouraged to use non-text materials to help develop reading. Parker asserted:

The word itself should be subordinate and secondary in interest to the child to the idea that excites the mind (p.31). We do not learn the word in order to read the sentence, but we read the sentence in order to learn the word (p.32).

The model was revolutionary in its own time as it was so different from previous
models which accentuated the mechanics of reading. It suggested that reading was not sequential but a 'whole experience' and encouraged educators to explore new ways of approaching the teaching of reading. Huey's work (1908) also supported this notion; he believed it was easier to identify letters in words than in random sequence (McClelland & Rumelhart, 1985).

From the beginning of the twentieth century, silent reading became significant in reading education as a means of improving comprehension (Robinson et al. 1990; Venesky, 1984; Farr & Carey, 1986, Lipson & Wixson, 1991; Readance & Moore, 1983; Robeck & Wallace, 1990). Gray was an instrumental force in establishing silent reading's governing role in the early twentieth century. His early work used reproduction to measure comprehension, but added questions to attain a more valid assessment; after reading a passage, students gave a reproduction of content and were asked ten questions about the passage of which the answers were recorded in the same way as the reproductions; no inferences were allowed (Readance & Moore, 1983).

This type of comprehension, which focussed on regurgitating content, dominated reading research up until the 1960s due to the influence Ebbinghaus had over the study of memory (Venesky, 1984). In Venesky's discussion of Henderson's (1903) and Bartlett's (1932) work, the role memory organisation has in understanding concepts is emphasised. Conceptual organisation in memory, with prior experience, exerts an increasingly stronger role each time a text is read. Bartlett noted that in reading texts outside a familiar cultural framework, readers interpreted the text through using their own schemata.

Later in the 1950s Gray criticised the emphasis on phonics being taught in isolation and believed that integrated word recognition and meaningful contexts be
taught from the earliest stages of reading (Robeck & Wallace, 1990). In the overview of Gray's theory, Robinson et al. (1990) reveal researchers have been directed by his ideas even to the present day. His concerns about the impact of prior knowledge, and the emphasising of such skills as topic sentences and relational words to improve the quality of reading, are practised in many classrooms in the 1990s.

The move away from teaching phonics in isolation was also advocated by Gates (Robeck & Wallace, 1990). Gates suggested phonics as an isolated skill did not transfer to comprehension of text material. He believed children's thinking processes could be improved through the development of perceptual thinking, associative thinking and creative thinking. The problem with such a theory was that it did not match the psycho educational models of reading which dominated the way reading was taught in schools.

**Reading as 'Intelligence'**

The emergence of psychometric design in measuring comprehension stems from the practice of viewing reading as a way of testing intelligence. This paradigm is based on the assumption that all cognitive skills are acquired through a developmental process which is universal; hence the assumption that the skills could be precisely defined and measured.

Educational authorities faced with the growth of huge communities due to the impact of the industrial revolution, introduced standardised testing of reading to supposedly ensure talent could be recognised regardless of background. The irony is that today standardised testing is criticised because it creates barriers for many social groups (Farr & Carey, 1986). Teachers during this time were faced with teaching
students to read to pass a required examination. In addition to the development of computerised testing, the onset of the depression in 1929 and World War II played a part in intensifying the role that standardised testing played in education. Standardised tests were easy to administer, thus reliance on these tests to diagnose disability, predict success, place students in special programmes and demonstrate instructional effectiveness became firmly entrenched in educational spheres. With money being poured into educational programmes to support education for the underprivileged, governments demanded accountability through standardised testing (Van Liersburg, 1991).

The development of psychometric testing has restrained the direction of reading theory and even the ramifications of psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic theories have failed to curtail the way quantitative methods of assessment continue to operate.

**Psycholinguistic Theory**

Psycholinguistic theory asserts that reading is an interactive, cognitive and linguistic process between the reader and coded language on the page (Goodman, 1968; Smith, 1973). Teachers using the psycholinguistic method of reading would work with the student’s ability to recode language, their past language experience and their general experiential and conceptual backgrounds, in order to improve the quality of reading.

Psycholinguistic theory suggests there is less reliance on the eyes in reading than previous theories. Although you need to see the print to read, the act of reading is more to do with the information being received by the brain. Psycholinguists believe the more non-visual information you have before reading a text the less visual
information you require to decode the meaning. Readers are therefore faced with a number of alternatives in deciding upon the meaning of a text. Smith advocates that readers must be willing to make mistakes in their search for meaning. This idea contrasts with previous theories which insist that reading focusses on memory, reproduction and identifying the text’s meaning.

Smith’s (1973) definition of reading recognises that meaning does not reside in the surface features of the text. The meaning readers comprehend from the text is always relative to what they know and what they want to know. He acknowledges the conceptual difficulty in saying what meaning is, as it is dependent on what the reader perceives as the meaning; about the alternatives that may exist in the reader’s mind. He suggests maybe there are many readings of texts depending on what the reader is looking for. Smith points out that meaning lies beyond words:

The difficulty with meaning is that we frequently have trouble conceptualising it independently of words. But meaning is clearly something extra linguistic, something beyond words (or underlying words, if we adopt the convention that the meaningful interpretation of sentences and utterances takes place at a deeper level of language). Words are eminently convenient - although not unique-vehicles for expressing and conveying meaning, but in the ultimate analysis we cannot point to one particular set of words and say they are a particular meaning” (p.p 75 & 76).

Since the 1970s there have been a number of interactive theories developed which suggest that “meaning is not simply in the text and the reader. Rather, the meaning
created as readers and writers encounter texts, is seen as ‘greater than’ the written text or the reader’s prior knowledge” (Cairney, 1990, p.14.). Cairney acknowledges that defining the reading process is a difficult subject; “one is trying to describe a process that cannot be seen - that occurs inside the head” (p.14.). Meaning cannot be fixed and is relative to the specific context of the reader at a particular point in time. Tierney and Pearson (1985) insist the reader has a right to interpretation. Their ‘Composing Model of Reading’ encourages an interactive relationship between writer, reader and text. They believe that reading must be more than a regurgitation of the writer’s ideas and must actively engage the reader’s use of background knowledge in negotiating the text’s meaning. What the reader brings to the text, is therefore, as important as what the writer brings, in producing the text. “No single element has a greater influence on a reader’s ability to understand a text than a reader’s previous knowledge” (cited in Burnes & Page, 1985 p.45.). When readers comprehend written text, they rely on pre-existing meaning otherwise very little would be understood; “meaning must exist inside our head before we start reading anything” (Kemp, 1985 p.180). Johnston (1984) supports Kemp’s view indicating that “comprehending involves building in one’s head a model of the presumed meaning of the text” (p.154).

Within each context of reading, particular strategies are used by readers to assist them in their interpretation of texts. These strategies, known as metacognitive skills, involve checking and monitoring understanding whilst reading to evaluate their level of comprehension. These metacognitive strategies reveal the knowledge and control readers have over their own comprehension of texts (Baker & Brown, 1980). Metacognition can be defined as the ability to guide and control the strategies required in reading a text. To be able to retrieve information, you need to engage prior knowledge, re-read, seek external confirmation, self-correct, formulate images about what you are reading and retrieve everything you already know about the topic (Rowe,
These skills are all important in negotiating meaning in the text and all relate to the way texts are comprehended. Irwin (1991) suggests that to read effectively, students must employ metacognitive decisions to select, evaluate and regulate reading comprehension strategies. She explains that good readers know when they have not understood something. Cullen (1991) explains that “metacognition encompasses two dimensions: our knowledge of our thinking and learning processes, and our ability to control our learning and thinking on the basis of this knowledge” (p.339). Therefore if metacognitive strategies are, as Cullen points out, linked to “our knowledge of our thinking and learning processes”, the social shaping of the individual must be acknowledged as a determinant in the reading process. The way individuals think and learn is invariably linked to the social practices in their lives.

**Current Reading Theory**

Whereas past theories about reading tended to view the text as sole authority, present theories acknowledge texts as value laden and context bound. Current theories also suggest that readers make meaning of texts through the way their reading practices, which have been shaped by the social practices, are engaged as they learn to read. The emphasis of current theories about reading practice is that the reader plays an active role in the construction of meaning (Luke & Walton, 1993; Kress, 1985; Lee, 1991). Luke and Walton claim the interactive relationship among reader, writer and text reveals that interpretation cannot be universal. Texts are “important sites for the cross-generational reproduction of discourse and ideology, identity and power within communities “(p.14). Kress emphasises the struggle for dominance of differing discourses in texts whilst Lee maintains that access to these discourses is not always available to all individuals. These views promote reading as an active thinking process in which readers must pull from their own cultural, social and political values and past
experience, in order to make sense of what they read (Robeck & Wallace, 1990).

Social Construction of Reading

The construction of a model of meaning inside one’s head directs exploration of how models of meaning are set into place within the individual. Given that language is shaped by social groups and carries the assumptions about ways of living for that particular group, learning to read is also a process of learning how to behave within a social group or institution. Reading therefore is not a private act but a social practice. When we read, we do not make individual choices about our reading but learn how to interpret information in relation to the social community to which we belong. Cook (1973) points out that when we interpret the world around us we relate to our previous experiences, our parents’ and teachers’ experiences, and this helps us form knowledge which functions as a reference for further interpretation.

This affirms the way a reader can come back to the same text and read in another way due to schemata, which are stored in long term memory, being reactivated by new stimuli because of the experiential growth of the reader, or the reader being placed in a different context.

Furthermore, evidence from Halliday’s (1978) work centering around his son Nigel’s language development indicated a child’s own acts of meaning relate to his/her own social constructs. He points out that meaning always has a context and the way in which an act of meaning is related to its context, changes in its course of development.

A child’s own act of meaning in an educational setting is shaped alongside children’s acts of meaning. Luke (1993) points out that schools and teachers frame
what is valued as literacy in terms of the dominant culture, and "relative equality or inequality of access has a significant impact on students' life trajectories" (p.6). Baker (1991) also supports this view insisting the "classroom is a specific institutional site in which particular ways of being and becoming literate are designed and enacted" (p.104).

Family environments of minority groups are often blamed for poor reading skills (Auerbach, 1989; Heath, 1983). Auerbach (1989), insists that many assumptions made about these failures are inaccurate. Her research revealed that the context for using literacy was integrated into many aspects of family life in minority groups, and these families saw literacy and schooling as the key to social mobility and changing their status. The relationships between parents and children in these families were complex and interactive; the site of literacy intentions was not only located with the parents' intentions but from child to parents as well. She claims lack of success lies in the perception of what is valued as sound literacy practice.

Heath's (1983) study of three rural communities in the Piedmont Carolinas suggests that, because authority is vested in and maintained by the middle class mainstream culture, the problem is not one of a deficit of culture but one of differential usage of reading practices. The reading practices used by mainstream groups emerge as the norm for all and have greater status than those of minority cultures. In Heath’s observations, the patterns of language of the Roadville and Trackton children stood in sharp contrast to each other, as well as to the children from the white townspeople. Although all parents in all three communities wanted to see their children achieve in the education system, their constructions of the social activities the children engaged in, for access to oral and written language, varied greatly. Heath encourages educators to break boundaries between what goes on in classrooms and what occurs at home, so
cultural patterns can be integrated rather than devalued. She believes as long as schools continue to legitimate and reproduce practices which privilege the dominant ideology and marginalise the belief structures of minority groups, the inequitable status quo will be maintained.

Rivalland (1994) details ways in which mothers promote children’s literacy at home. She suggests, that if teachers knew more about the home literacy practices in operation, the cultural dissonance between home and school might be reduced. Like Auerbach and Heath, Rivalland found home practices rested strongly on the aspirations and expectations of success of parents, and the personal and linguistic resources parents could muster in order to support their children’s literacy. Evidence of socialisation of different patterns also emerged in the different families. Rivalland points out that the “diversity of the Australian population, a large migrant population and the mobility of the work force have constructed school communities which are unlikely to be homogeneous in either their socialisation processes or the construction of literacy practices” (p.299). The lack of homogeneity which exists within society, further reinforces the diversity of access to cultural knowledge and social power.

Gumperz (1986) warns educators that the gap in literacy achievement is widening as children from low income and of ethnic minority backgrounds are over-represented as school failures. It would appear that by enforcing situations, which include multiple choice reading comprehension tests, students are forced into positions where they are classified as deficient readers. These practices nurture the power of organisations and reinforce the economic and political exclusion of minority groups.

To attribute reading problems to limited overall cognitive ability does not take into account the various types of behaviour and knowledge which mean different things
to different individuals (Lipson & Wixson, 1991). When readers come from various backgrounds they will interpret the same story differently; even readers from the same background will come to alternative interpretations dependent on the schemata activated. Therefore a reader's knowledge of the dominant culture is crucial for text understanding, especially in test situations (Anderson & Freebody, 1985). The problem is amplified in assessing reading comprehension because cultures are not homogeneous in thought and belief systems, therefore individual perspectives will vary due to these differences (Rogers-Zegarra & Singer, 1985; Gillet & Temple, 1990; Blom & Gumperz, 1972).

In minority cultures, therefore, students are measured for their familiarity with the English language as well as for their cultural understanding of the dominant culture. Singh (1994), points out that minority cultures become caught up in a struggle to fight against negative cultural, disciplinary and literary representations, which exclude them from succeeding in the dominant culture. Students who present as poor readers due to dialectic differences, experience both language and racial barriers in their pursuit of achievement, for the English language as they see it, is like learning a foreign language to which they have little access (Ima & Labovitz, 1991). These students present from families who view literacy and act out literacy practices differently from the dominant group.

Comprehension it appears, is very complex and depends on the process readers move through to arrive at meaning. The comprehension of the multiple texts in a multiple choice reading test, signals further complexity as the structure of the test emphasises that comprehension is the product which results from making the right choice from the alternatives presented in the text. It does not acknowledge the process readers go through as they are making meaning. The process readers move through to
make meaning is controlled by knowledge of their own physical and social worlds. The wider social and political constructs valued by society and put in place as naturalised expectations of behaviour, as well as the micro social constructs encasing the personal world of each individual, position readers to see texts and the world in which they are constructed, from a specific perspective. To read for a multiple choice reading test is a distinctive type of reading in itself and differs from reading in other settings within and outside the school arena. In each type of setting the way in which knowledge and truth are embedded into the textual structure of texts affects the way individuals interpret texts (Baker 1991). This suggests that methodologies and assessment procedures are problematic when methodology supports a holistic view of reading, and assessment structures construct a view of reading as the sum of multiple parts, to which each reader has equal access and relates to these parts in the same way.

**Critical Literacy**

Present theory embraces the idea of interpreting texts in many ways. Emphasis on a single, restricted and authoritative reading is no longer central in reading comprehension (Belsey, 1980). Gee (1990) challenges the view that one version of meaning should be privileged as if it were natural for all people. He also suggests that the privileged meaning is usually that of the politically powerful and well-educated. Foucault (1988) maintains that the power to align individuals to the power structures operating in society is not necessarily overt but can be diffused and hidden through social control and depends on the way dominant groups have been formed historically.

Thompson’s (1991) endorsement of Gee and Belsey’s ideas also encourages readers to argue with and against a text’s ideology as a way of testing values and beliefs:
Responses to texts are not just subjective, individual, personal or natural. They are culturally produced, a part of the ideology of society. Once you realise how and why you’ve read a book in a particular way you can choose to read it in alternative ways.

Texts have multiple meanings. (p.5.)

Current theory suggests that successful reading comprehension should include the capacity for students to be critically literate, that is, comprehension includes being able to understand the linguistic or cultural underpinnings shaping texts (Vasque, 1994; Lipson & Wixson, 1991; Anderson & Freebody, 1985 Rogers -Zegarra & Singer, 1985; Gillet & Temple, 1990; Blom & Gumperz, 1972; Auerbach, 1989; Flores, Cousin & Diaz, 1991; Brice Heath, 1983; Johnston, 1984; Bernstein, 1976; Luke, 1993; Kress, 1985; Hasan, 1973; Gumperz, 1986; Rivalland, 1994). To take a different reading opens up possibilities of exclusion from the dominant group and thus may lead to less social power. A dominant community group, whose beliefs and attitudes are generally seen as unambiguous and are internalised by members of that group are unlikely to accept alternative interpretations of texts. (Hasan, 1973; Kress, 1985; Luke, 1993; 1994; Diehl & Mickulecky, cited in Luke, 1993; Johnston, 1984; Ringler & Weber, 1984; Brice Heath, 1985; Flores et al. 1991; Gee, 1990).

In the past, social and political theory in westernised countries has privileged white, middle class belief structures and all practices in westernised society supported this ideology. In 1995 social and political theory appear to endorse multiculturalist and gender theories which acknowledge the differences in lifestyle and belief structures of different groups in society. In practice, however, many educational assessment procedures, of which multiple choice reading comprehension is one, can work against
theory, perhaps suggesting that theory in operation is impervious to theoretical analysis. The lack of theoretical analysis of assessment procedures, and of their suitability in an education system which, in principle, supports theories which acknowledge the underpinning of social construction in every aspect of society, must therefore be challenged, and action taken to ensure more suitable procedures are put in place. Only when theory is supported by assessment procedures which acknowledge and value the different levels of meaning in texts, will a more equitable and valid system unfold.

According to Johnston (1984), the validity of reading tests can in many respects be seen as a sociopolitical issue. To agree or disagree with a text depends on the textual rituals of the community to which the reader belongs, Literacy is ‘done’ by a reader; it is not something a reader possesses (Luke, 1993). The process of socialisation of an individual is a complex process of control. Socialisation sensitises the individual to the various orderings of society and the roles he or she has to play (Bernstein, 1976). Students who therefore read differently, are punished by being excluded from the literate traditions which the society has constructed. Ringler and Weber (1984), insist on the need for greater cultural acceptance of minority groups, to focus on recognising and understanding the differences in ideas, values and practices which are different from the dominant teacher and culture.

Brice Heath (1985) also cautions educators to note the denial of life chances to a major portion of the population through unreasonable testing procedures. Being literate is not just about being employed but is also dependent on upward socioeconomic mobility. If people “behave and think as literates” (p.2) they will be more likely to succeed in society.
The type of testing imposed on the student population can threaten their future life choices. Kress (1985) emphasises that in a literate society how and what a reader reads and writes is interpreted as a significant marker of class, gender and ethnicity. The importance of belonging to that part of society which canonises what is valued, is crucial to an individual's literacy, and possibly, to social success.

**Cultural Processing of Information**

The interpretations or semantic representations that are possible when thinking about what a word could mean in a given context, indicates that computation of information is not stored in advance but has to occur whilst readers negotiate meaning in given contexts. On a macro level this would mean all "linguistic systems in their own right at their various levels of representation have to be stored in the procedures and not separately" (Balota, Flores d'Arcais & Raynor, 1990, p. 198).

The testing of procedural thinking in regards to reading comprehension becomes problematic, as different groups in society construct individual patterns of thinking in the way the ideologies of particular groups encourage individuals to behave within those groups. To test such procedures therefore, would privilege the thinking of one group over another, resulting in the other group emerging disadvantaged. Thus if in Western society, white middle class thinking styles generally frame multiple choice reading tests, students adopting thinking patterns outside the dominant culture are identified as less intelligent than those able to match the required meanings of the items in the test.

Bruner (1974) endeavours to point out that "intelligence is to a great extent the internalisation of tools provided by a given culture" (p.369). He points out that the
way perception is organised differs from culture to culture because of the way indicators of meaning connect to different schemata in different cultures. Bruner challenges Piaget's theory regarding the grouping of things that share a common attribute (superordination). He believes the development of superordination is clearly relative to cultural conditions and values, and not the universal stage of egocentricism described by Piaget. His work with Eskimo children revealed that they did not express the function of things in terms of personal interaction as did Western children as their culture strongly suppresses individualism. Similar results were found by Brice Heath (1983).

Bruner insists that world views and ideologies are reflected strongly in the way cognitive growth is perceived in society. He warns that "every concept must be defined as much by what it excludes as by what it includes" (p.374). His work with children from Wolof and French lexicons revealed that if there is no access to a particular language then comprehension becomes increasingly difficult. In his attempt to highlight the problems with categorisation, which is considered an important skill for reading in Western society, he found Wolof children often failed to verbalise the grouping of data because their definition of language was inadequate compared with that of French children; in this case it related to children from the Wolof culture having only one word to define two colours. This example at the micro level reveals the difficulties minority groups face as "schema can operate only where called into play; language affects cognition only if a linguistic coding occurs, that is, only if the stimulus is given verbal representation" (Bruner, 1974, p.383). The particular strategies students use in decoding information (metacognition) therefore rests on their thinking styles which are socially patterned to position them to negotiate meaning in a certain way.
The problem is not a deficit in these students' backgrounds but in what is valued as sound literacy practice (Brice Heath, 1983; Meier, 1981). Children from anglo middle class backgrounds learn the kinds of literacy skills and practices to do well at school because their parents use and transmit literacy in specific ways that school institutional practice expects (Auerbach, 1989; Flores et al. 1991). What is involved in reading texts is a set of literacies; the ability to read texts of a certain type in certain ways at certain levels. If students are not socialised into a practice to read texts in a certain way, even finely tuned metacognitive skills may not lead to success in reading tests which reject the idea that there are alternative ways of reading a text.

**Theory Underpinning Teaching of Subject English**

The present English syllabi in Australian High Schools embrace socio-cultural theory and include particular objectives which recognise the complexities of reading comprehension:

The sense readers make of texts depends on their personal experiences, language skills and the contexts in which they are reading. Meanings therefore arise out of the relationships between and among the writer, reader, text and context.

In their study of each text, students need to understand their own contexts as readers, including the expectations, attitudes and values they bring to the text (West Australian English Syllabus, 1994).
The curriculum in Western Australia acknowledges the postructuralist model of reading, by stating explicitly that students must understand how their reading is shaped by various social constructs, yet examiners of this syllabus support multiple choice comprehension testing which denies the potentiality of semantic diversity. Although the multiple choice reading passages and items may in fact operate effectively as a teaching tool within the classroom to focus on the different ways a text can be read, to use it as a test which measures a student's comprehension ability and level of critical literacy does not recognise the complex cultural constructs embedded into interpretation.

Crebbin (1992) insists that teachers must become more aware of the different ideological paradigms operating in the education system. Not until constructivist and reductionist conflicts are fully understood will teachers unpack the political assumptions and social impact of their own teaching practices. She asserts that ability is not one dimensional but is linked to personal and social factors, such as race, sex, individual characteristics and social background. Teachers have to take these factors into account when they analyse their own reading position in relation to the way they may influence the reading position of their students.

Teachers, who encourage their students to acknowledge competitive readings of texts, could in fact disadvantage their students if dominant readings are being privileged by the comprehension tests being used. Even though English syllabi move toward cultural orientation of reading, the examining panel, in constructing multiple choice reading items, dependent on the reading privileged by them, may ignore the fact that students could interpret the questions and distractor choices from a different ideological paradigm. In the past, a liberal humanist reading may have been privileged whereas in the present sociological climate, students may be positioned to construct gendered,
multicultural readings. In making a particular choice, much of what is excluded could in fact be important for a deeper understanding of the text. Teachers, who teach to the ideology of the syllabus, ensure pedagogical instruction which acknowledges and embraces the potential for semantic diversity. By using this constructivist approach, English teachers encourage students to see the way writers actively construct and represent the world through the words they choose to use. Luke and Walton (1993) maintain that to be able to read critically “requires awareness of and facility with techniques by which texts and discourses construct and position human subjects and social reality” (p.15).

A teacher who enacts the theory of the syllabus endeavours to develop students’ awareness of the power structures which operate in society and gives them insight into how texts work and position them as readers, but also encourages them to understand that there are alternative readings of texts. This development of critical literacy encourages students to see that literate practice is always morally and politically loaded; to work with a text does not necessarily involve uncritically buying into its world view or position (Luke, O’Brien & Comber, 1994).

Thus, in teaching to the syllabus, teachers instruct and facilitate understanding in their students and demonstrate the role the reader plays in the construction of meaning, encouraging them to think critically and resist dominant readings presented in texts. Yet, preparing students to sit a multiple choice reading test creates a situation where teachers must work against the theory supporting the syllabus, as they must attempt to discourage students from reading the text from their own position and attempt to predict the reading intended by the test constructors. The mismatch between the ideology of English syllabi and the theory underpinning assessment of reading comprehension using this format, requires close examination to ensure changes occur
to bring syllabus guidelines and evaluation procedures into closer alignment.

**Multiple Choice Reading Tests**

Early test designers concentrated on objective and convenient measurements which did not provide a complete picture of students' comprehension abilities (Readance & Moore, 1983; Robeck & Wallace, 1990). Thorndike's work, 1917 onwards, identified reading as an active process but test designs for reading comprehension indicated there was only one right answer to a question asked. Robeck and Wallace (1990), point out that Thorndike believed incorrect responses resulted from three types of errors:

- failing to identify correct meaning of words
- assigning too little or too much importance to a word or idea
- failing to treat the ideas produced by reading as provisional.

Because Thorndike's 'incorrect responses' still dominate assessment of reading comprehension using the multiple choice format, examination of what these failures actually mean invites discussion. What is exposed in Thorndike's discussion of student failures is the value system operating to exclude other possibilities as answers. We need to ask from whose ideological position and determination of intelligence do they emerge? Even within a particular context there is more than one way in which words can be interpreted. From what position is the examiner operating, in deciding whether too much importance has been given to a particular word or idea? Even if readers set up provisional ideas to be accepted or rejected through further reading, who makes the final decision regarding the failure of the reader to negotiate meaning? What is operating here is a power base held over the reader to arrive at a meaning intended, not necessarily by the writer but by the interpretation placed on the text by the people.
who construct the test. Educational psychologists elaborated on Thorndike’s principles of learning to endorse and implement testing procedures which supported a narrow utilitarian view of reading. Robeck and Wallace (1990), contend that educational psychologists linked reading with the behaviour of the individual and were concerned with measuring internal responses; examples of this were found in Skinner’s theory of operant conditioning in the 1950s which indicated anyone displaying different behaviour could be shaped by conditioning; Hull’s idea of reinforcement as a stimulus to satisfy a psychological need to perform and Tolman’s perspectives on learning as thinking, planning, reference and intention. What these theories endorsed was individual agency; no credence was given to the influence of social background.

With the introduction of computerised scoring, standardised testing of reading comprehension became firmly entrenched in educational systems worldwide and was seen as a most cost effective way to test the student population (Johnston, 1984; Farr & Carey, 1986; Van Liersburg, 1991; Readance & Moore, 1983). Psychometric testing took firm hold on the definitions of reading and for more than seven decades has dominated classroom reading practice.

The process of comprehension is not addressed satisfactorily in testing which uses the multiple choice format (Johnston, 1984; Langer, 1982). Langer (1992) asserts that multiple choice reading tests do not measure the processes involved in the construction of meaning nor do they evaluate an individual’s ability to manage those processes. Johnston (1984) believes it is time for a thorough review of our approach to assessment in reading, and the trade-offs we have been making, because too many assumptions have remained untested for too long. Current research has emphasised the need to research process over product, yet educators insist relying on the more conveniently obtainable product data.
There needs to be greater concern over the reasons behind the responses. The bottom line is we need to be more concerned about the process of the individual and about the process assessment in context. Failure to challenge the status quo may be the worst form of intellectual complacency (p.175 and 176).

Gipps and Wood (1981) warn that testing techniques lag behind present theory because testing remains in the hands of test development experts rather than reading experts. Multiple choice reading comprehension tests cannot test the reading process as a whole; only one or two aspects are examined which then determine the dominant model of reading for classroom practice. Teachers naturalise this dominant model to ensure students pass tests but in doing so move away from what readers actually do when they are reading.

**Multiple Choice Test Reading Practices**

Readers making meaning from multiple choice reading texts use many strategies in attempting to arrive at the ‘correct’ meaning as identified by item writers. However, the success of a reader taking a multiple choice reading test is not necessarily a measure of the depth of textual understanding (Thissen, Steinberg & Fitzpatrick, 1989; Kubisyn & Borich, 1987; Farr, Pritchard & Smitten, 1990; Kemp, 1985; Ben-Shakhar & Sinai, 1991; Bridgeman, 1992; Seda, 1989; Bauman, 1982).

Thissen et al. (1989) reveal some examinees approach a multiple choice item by first reading the answer choices and then reading the question because the question serves only as a guide to picking the most correct of the available alternatives.
Although this may be a valid reading practice in one sense, it does not indicate a deep understanding of the texts read. Farr et al. (1990) confirm such findings and believe guessing is a major factor in making choices for the correct answer. They cite Bussis and Chitterdon's research (1987) which revealed that "tests feature certain characteristics that downplay the importance of prior knowledge and discourage students from applying what they know to the material they encounter" (P.210). Their strongest criticism of multiple choice tests suggests examinees do not read and comprehend the reading selections accompanying them at all. They aim to get an acceptable answer rather than understand what they have read.

The difference between students identified as good readers does not always indicate a better performance than poor readers in multiple choice reading comprehension tests. Bauman's 1982 study examined sentence structures in reading tests to investigate whether the way sentences were structured, hindered or facilitated items. Analysis indicated poorer readers' comprehension skills were qualitatively similar to better readers. Criticism was made of questions which presented two defensible choices. Bauman blames the test-makers inattention to the way the linguistic structures of the passages create the opportunity for multiple interpretations.

Edelsky (1991), also strives to point out the lack of relationship between good and poor performances in multiple choice tests. She cites Altwerger and Resta's study of 1000 children where no particular relationship was found between children's actual reading and scores on a reading test. Some students scored highly but read poorly; others scored high and read well; others did not. Gillet and Temple (1990) confirm such findings; "the scores at either the high or low end of the performance scale are less accurate; superior readers are often underestimated while poor readers can get scores well above instructional levels" (p.406).
Ben-Shakhar and Sinai's study focussed on gender differences in multiple choice tests. Results revealed that some of the differences in performance were attributed to differences in response style; specifically the tendency to omit items and guess. Males were more likely to omit than females, even on tests where females showed superiority. The differences in the socially patterned behaviours of males and females could lead the male population to take more risks in choosing responses than the female population, as risk taking in western society is valued highly for males, whereas passivity has been internalised by females through the patriarchal structures of society. Although this is a generalisation about Ben-Shakhar and Sinai's findings, there is much documented evidence to support findings which relate reading behaviour to gendered practices. Gilbert (1989) asserts that reading is socially constructed and in learning cultural practices, readers learn what it means to be male and female. Girls construct and reconstruct their own identities in relation to being female through what they read, and become very aware of the social differences and power relations through the texts they choose to read (Christian-Smith, 1993). Therefore through their reading, they come to understand and naturalise what is desirable behaviour in being female and this generally reinforces their passivity.

Bridgeman's 1992 study of open ended response format in comparison to the multiple choice test revealed three major advantages:

- it eliminated the measurement error by eliminating guessing
- it eliminated unintended feedback which is inherent in multiple choice items
- problems could not be worked back from answers.

Bridgeman concluded that if the intent of the multiple choice reading test is to describe specific skills (which were not stated) that students possess, the open ended format seemed clearly superior.
Seda (1989) supports such findings. Seda’s study compared information from two multiple choice tests (one traditional with one correct answer per question and one with multiple answers per question) and two free response measures (retellings and semi-structures (interviews). Student results differed according to the measure used. Findings revealed:

- students chose responses which came closer to their text understanding whether or not they thought it was the best answer to the question
- questions in the multiple choice tests seemed to focus on text information which was different from the information students reported on in their free-response assessment tasks
- readers organised information hierarchically and used this hierarchy to produce their retellings. Multiple choice questions did not seem to organise information in the same manner.

Seda concluded (citing Davey, 1989) that the cognitive processing required for each of the tasks was different. The reading processes and tasks assessed were so different that a good performance on one task did not necessarily relate to the same performance on another task.

**Cultural Bias in Testing Reading Comprehension**

To be able to see meaning from someone else’s perspective would enable many readers to gain more operative power in society; however the dominant view of reality creates an environment where many people are classified as poor readers due to a lack of performance in reading testing. Classroom practice reinforces the need to perform and thus the cyclical nature of failure is perpetuated. The challenge appears to be in
designing a test which is cost effective and culturally appropriate.


Cook-Gumperz (1986), explains that the effect of linking literacy to cognitive skills acquired through technologically developed schooling reduces learning of skills to a technical process which is regarded as socially neutral. She advocates that literacy is a much wider product of the community and insists linguistic differences become seen as sociolinguistic inadequacies, and that they are blamed for failure to function successfully in the literate world.

Particular aspects of the multiple choice reading test which relate to cultural bias include: content of questions, the way questions are asked, and the inclusion and exclusion of background knowledge.

**Constructing Questions**

Given the influence of social construction on the individual, people are not likely to approach questions or distractors in the same way. Pearson and Johnson (1978), classify relations that exist between questions and responses into categories because questions cannot be classified in isolation. "Questions which on the surface look like they require simple, straightforward, literal recall of factual details may in fact
require a complex set of inferences which involve the integration of textual and scriptual information” (p.164). They label the relationship between questions and responses as textually explicit, textually implicit or scriptually implicit:

**Textually explicit** - if both the question and the answer are derivable from the text and if the relation between the question and the answer was explicitly cued by the language of the text.

**Textually implicit** - if both the question and the answer are derivable from the text but there is no logical or grammatical cue tying the question to the answer and the answer is plausible in light of the question (reading between the lines).

**Scriptually implicit** - whenever a plausible non textual response is given to a question derivable from the text (reading beyond the lines) (p.p163-164).

Similarly, Johnson (1984) outlines problems associated with constructing questions for multiple choice reading tests. His concerns include questions which test prior knowledge and those which relate directly to the passage. These types of questions present difficulties in comparative analysis. With questions associated with the passage itself, students may be merely matching distractors. With questions dependent on prior knowledge, there is no way of knowing what the readers knew before they started reading or whether the information was gained from the text itself. Questions can therefore disadvantage students from social backgrounds where there is little access to the specific knowledge required for the question and this therefore reinforces the importance of belonging to the dominant culture.
Gipps and Wood (1981), support this view adding that questions are often more difficult to read than the passage and cause students to focus on the questions’ meaning rather than the meaning they make from the passage. The ability to read the questions and unfamiliar material quickly, for which many readers lack the conceptual background, affects the accuracy of comprehension and does not indicate whether particular students with another passage and in a different context would perform better (Carver, 1985; Meier, 1981).

The Reader’s Use of Background Information

If questions used in multiple choice tests eliminate background information, one of the most important features of comprehension is ignored (Harker, 1990; Johnston, 1983). Problems in seeking predetermined correct answers occur when students apply their schemata to the macro structures of texts and derive propositions which were not considered by item writers.

Meier’s 1981 study of seven year old children’s responses, from a low-socioeconomic multicultural background, confirms these findings. She found students could discuss the content of the passage, revealing they possessed sound comprehension skills but they still came up with the wrong answers in the multiple choice reading test, as their answers did not fit the test writer’s understanding of the passage.

The following extract was used with the class of students:

Some days I should stay in bed. Today was one of those days.
"Good morning," Mum said. "Don't you have a clean shirt to wear? That one looks dirty."

"Sam," said Dad, "your shoes are on the wrong feet."

I got dressed all over again. By the time I ate my breakfast my cereal was soggy. Then I stopped as usual, for Bill. He was not home. He had already gone to school. I walked there alone. When I got to school, Bill yelled, Here comes Sam, the snail"

Why was Sam so slow in getting to school?

A. He overslept.
B. He had to get dressed twice.
C. He fooled around.
D. He did not like school.

The given answer to the question was: **He had to get dressed twice.** Meier noted that when discussing the children's answers most thought Sam was fooling around and a few thought he didn't like school. In analysing these answers the literal interpretation was the correct test response; however accepting the premise that reading is an active and constructive process, students used their own schemata within a particular ideological framework regarding school, to interpret the question. The question focuses on being slow in getting ready for school. The test writer did not contemplate the complexities of the question. Students however 'elaborated' by scripting themselves to the same position as Sam getting ready for school. English teachers do this all the time; invite students to predict and elaborate as the character. For some of these children in Meier's study, the parent/child discourse in operation in the early mornings indicated to them that if they were not ready in time for school they
must be fooling around. Sam’s general disorganised routine in the morning, which led him to wear a dirty shirt and put his shoes on the wrong feet, could imply a stalling for time because he did not want to go to school. By using the definite article before ‘snail’, Sam’s position is further objectified and leads the reader to possibly infer that this behaviour happens regularly because Bill has given him this title. There are possibly other ways of making meaning from this passage but by rejecting the literal interpretation of the passage, students added a far greater richness to their own understanding of the short narrative. Meier maintains that as long as we have tests and a scoring system designed to produce a ranked order, there will not be a rise in reading scores of students in the overall population. The measuring instruments guarantee the status quo will remain; if students show improvement, test designers will construct tests which contain more difficult passages to read or will design trickier questions.

Langer (1982) substantiates Meier’s concerns, maintaining that the density of ideas presented in passages in multiple choice reading tests cause integration problems for the readers by presenting information which does not link with the available schematic choices of the reader. Langer’s study of subjects at a variety of age levels, examined the semantic diversity readers construct from multiple choice reading tests. In examining the processes students moved through in making choices, she discovered that not only were there vocabulary problems with the distractors, but many students did not understand the vocabulary of the questions. Bilingual children, who were used to hearing ‘incorrect’ constructions of grammar in their home environments often chose distractors which matched their ‘home’ constructions of grammar.

The density of ideas becomes a major concern for those students who have little background knowledge of the content in reading tests. The level of sophistication of different readers has to be taken into account when constructing tests, although it
must be acknowledged that it is difficult for item writers to construct items which reflect varying rural, urban, racial, educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. Criticism also extends to the effect on classroom practices (Johnston, 1983). If reading tests encourage students to believe there is a correct answer, then this will in turn influence and endorse instruction which suggests that students are taught there is a single correct answer. Johnston (1992) asserts that one of the reasons multiple choice reading tests remain so powerful, is because they remain unquestioned. He criticises *The Degree of Reading Power*, a test used as a statewide testing device in New York. In an attempt to make the test culturally fair, students do not have to use previous knowledge and experience. He questions its validity in the light of reading research over the last twenty years. He is convincing in his assertion that cultural differences in social interactions and ways of viewing the world will reveal themselves in the way children go about learning. This type of testing supports an institutional view which only encourages reading for no other purpose than to ‘get it right’.

Pearson and Johnson (1978) also question the validity of items that assess prior knowledge and are culturally biased. Their discussion citing Mitchell’s 1965 study reveals that students are disadvantaged if questions relate to specific background knowledge; children taking a test which demands certain responses will not be able to answer items which make connections that foreground a particular culture. They use the example of a multiple choice reading test about ice fishing. One of the items asked students how fishermen drilled these holes... “In the Upper Mid-west, most children above the age of three already know you use an auger to drill a hole” (p.212). Children who do not share the same background as these children are therefore marginalised and have little chance of success with items which require such specific vocabulary knowledge. However, to create an unbiased test would mean using information about which no group had knowledge; this would be inadequate as it
would not test the normal demands of reading tasks. If a writing panel sets out to construct a fair test by reducing questions which require background knowledge, only a literal level of comprehension could be tested. Pearson and Johnson (1978), explain that readers predict outcomes from the information supplied. They use the example of a car running out of petrol; if you asked what happens next you'd probably infer the car stops (literal understanding). However, if we take it further we may wonder when it happened; is there a difference between it happening in the day or night? What type of things would you start to infer if it happened in the early hours of the morning? Would the scenario change if it was on a lonely country road or a busy city highway? What happens if you do not know the occupant of the car? Would you develop different schemata for a female driver than a male driver? No matter what the content of the passage readers will use prior knowledge to fill the gaps not stated by the writer.

Reading comprehension is culturally dependent, and students from minority cultures or those who shape their reading response in resistance to dominant readings, find themselves excluded from literacy achievement even if their comprehension processing of information is sound.

Mismatch between Reading Theory, Teaching of English and Multiple Choice Testing

To understand the lack of alignment between the ideologies of reading theory, teaching reading and multiple choice testing, it is necessary to consider the role of testing reading throughout the history of the subject. Multiple choice reading tests emerge from the psychometric testing paradigm, which is based on the assumption that all cognitive skills are acquired through a developmental process which is universal; hence the assumption is made that if skills are precisely defined they can be
satisfactorily measured, and all students can be measured against each other. The idea that psychological structures are created in the mind through interaction with the social environment, and not “given” (Vygotsky’s theory of mind 1924-34, cited in Williams, 1985) has not featured in the construction of the psychometric test design. If students fail at these tests it indicates their lack of ability, not a lack of learning or different social experience. As multiple choice reading tests place the text itself as authority; the predetermined reading, already fixed, does not allow interaction with the process the reader moves through to negotiate the meaning of the text. Because of the predetermined meaning in multiple choice reading tests, the processes involved in comprehension are manipulated. Even if a ‘product’ is required from reading it should reflect the process the test taker uses to generate responses that produce a reading comprehension test score; test scores across test takers should reflect the differences in processes used to read the test passage (Powell, 1989). Whilst agreeing in theory that the process needs analysis, it is important to acknowledge the inequities which could result from testing thinking processes, which of course, emerge from the different socio-cultural views of the student population taking the test.

In the past the psychological model has dominated testing procedures in reading comprehension using the multiple choice format. With the pursuit of critical literacy for all students, this testing lags far behind current pedagogy and does not allow students to show their ability to deconstruct their preferred meaning of the texts they read. Although the multiple choice reading test remains an effective ranking tool in examinations, it only ranks students according to the preferred readings of an examining panel. Because it can be administered to large groups in a relatively short time, is cost effective and can be scored effectively (Van Liersburg, 1991; Wood, 1988) those who hold the power by reinforcing its status are reluctant to question its ideological validity. There is a growing dichotomy between recent advances in
understanding the reading process and the tests used to measure reading achievement (Van Liersburg, 1991; Valencia & Pearson, 1987; Farr & Carey, 1986). Farr and Carey (1986) point out that as reading research and theory move away from academic psychology, the measurement of skills accelerates towards greater objectivity. The power play between paradigms becomes obvious when institutions implementing educational programmes are impervious to the new directions reading research has taken over the last twenty years. Valencia and Pearson (1987), confirm this position, indicating the influence of testing in an accountable and rationalist world is now greater than at any other time in the history of education.

As the models of literacy have changed over recent years the match between ideologies behind reading and the methodology of multiple choice tests have become weaker (Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Farr & Carey, 1986; Cambourne, 1985; Seda, 1989; Kalantzis et al., 1989; Lipson & Wixson, 1990; Harker, 1990; Edelsky, 1991; Gillet & Temple, 1990; Wood, 1988; Ringler & Weber, 1984).

Lipson and Wixson (1990) maintain the holistic, constructive process that varies as a function of the interactive relationship among reader, text and contextual factors is fundamental in assessing reading comprehension. Formal standardisation of tests treat reading as though the skills involved are isolated from each other. Harker (1990) supports this in claiming that the majority of standardised tests measure children's performance of various, arbitrarily prescribed, reading skills which research reveals has very little to do with reading. "The result is these tests measure an artificially fragmented and contrived construct of the reading process rather than the highly interactive one which research repeatedly reveals reading to be" (p.311). The problem is accentuated because every answer marked incorrect is one step closer to the candidate being classified as illiterate in examinations which make decisions about the
Cambourne (1985) argues that there are no scientific data which support the view that what is being tested has anything to do with the act of reading, and that the tests are based on untested assumptions about how readers go about the task of processing information. Criticism is directed at the manipulation and selection of items and at the way they are forced to fit a predetermined distribution; items are sampled, analysed, placed into a level of difficulty, then retested, and items which do not discriminate are discarded. In Western Australia, the multiple choice reading comprehension section of the Tertiary Entrance Examination paper for subject English is trialled interstate and when the “top” group of trial students fails to arrive at the preferred answer, or the average students perform just as well, the particular item is altered until the statistics fit the predetermined distribution (Quin, 1995). All the test constructor is left with is an instrument which discriminates between students on the basis of their responses to the manipulated test items. Cambourne points out, “the authority of the test rests in the fact it gives a number not designed to measure reading skills, but to discriminate between reading skills that will compare a child to an average reader in that test’s norming sample” (p. 170).

Edelsky (1991) maintains items cannot be made free from ambiguity so that everyone will interpret the questions in the same way before even contemplating the choices. She questions the scores on reading tests and believes they are more about the test taker’s similarity to the test writer:

One way to make the same judgements and have similar information as the test writer is to come from the same region. Another is to be from the same social class, the same ethnic and cultural group, and
of the same gender and therefore, be able to take the test writer's perspective on the right answer (p.144).

The present assessment structures in Western Australia supporting multiple choice reading tests present a bias against students who read from different positions which do not match that of the test constructors. The way items are selected for testing to ensure internal consistency, requires test constructors to select items that perform similarly to the whole test (Johnston, 1992; Quin, 1995). The framework of the questions is structured in such a stylised manner that it excludes many students not privileged to such discoursal operations. Both the content and methodology of multiple choice reading comprehension testing must be questioned. By using this form of testing only a particular ideological position is foregrounded about how people learn, how they remember, how language and learning go together, how people read, how we measure learning and how we measure language (Farr & Carey, 1986). Kalantzis et al. (1989) argue that standardised, objective testing should be replaced by new mechanisms of language learning and assessment which recognises the reality of pluralism. They insist it is impossible to construct a test that is independent of a cultural content and that in diversifying curriculum to meet the needs of a multicultural society, educators can not be prevented from teaching from their own value system. In preparing students for multiple choice reading comprehension tests, teachers can not take a neutral stance because they are themselves positioned in a particular way to read a text. A number of teachers given the same text to read will interpret the text differently and in turn, influence their students to take on a particular set of meanings when they read.

In considering assessment of literacy in subject English, it is important to take account of how texts and contexts might be negotiated differently. Institutional
Structures must not emerge as forces beyond reproach (Luke et al. 1994). The putting into place of a test which opposes the current theory underpinning literacy syllabi, must be questioned. What this type of testing focuses on is not so much comprehension skills but the furthering of the stratification of the student population into "different kinds and levels of achievement, occupational futures and hence social classes" (Diehl & Mickulecky, cited in Luke, 1993, p.21). Furthermore, it reinforces the inadequacy of current approaches to assessment not dealing "with the fact that constructs such as competence, mastery, ability, and readiness are value laden and carry considerable ideological baggage" (Johnston 1984, p.164).

Multiple choice reading tests promote a reductionist view of reading whilst the English syllabus promotes constructivist reading practices in the classroom. One of the problems which exacerbates this juxtaposition of interests, is that few teachers question the conflict between constructivist and reductionist views of learning, because they have had little training which enables them to unpack the political assumptions or social impact of different teaching approaches (Crebbin, 1992). Due to the lack of theoretical analysis of the contrasting views in operation, the unsuitable assessment structures remain in place for the evaluation of comprehension in the TEE for subject English. These structures are unconsciously supported by teachers even though they teach from the ideological position of an alternative paradigm. Analysis of an assessment system which opposes the theoretical position proposed by an English syllabus is imperative. Students who do exactly what is asked of them in daily practice, namely, to position themselves to see the different ways texts can be read, are disadvantaged when being assessed in a test which does not acknowledge that meaning in reading is multi-faceted. Flores et al. (1991), urge educators not to abide the intellectual presence of myths surrounding students who do not fit the mainstream culture. "Debilitating myths imprison the mind and render people voiceless and therefore powerless. This
voicelessness and powerlessness perpetuates the cycle of oppression, the cycle of inadequacy, the cycle of failure" (p.377). Equity in educational practice is vital for ensuring the best possible educational outcomes for students taking subject English. Until more literacy educators take up the challenge to question the validity of such testing, the present inequitable status quo will remain.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The Literature Review suggests that a mismatch exists between the English syllabus theory, current views of reading comprehension, and the use of multiple choice reading tests as a way of measuring reading comprehension. The multiple choice test for reading comprehension in the Western Australian Tertiary Entrance Examinations (TEE) for subject English is an example of a test which is incongruous with reading practices recommended by syllabus documentation and more recently, National Outcome Statements. In 1995 the TEE English paper was divided into three sections of which the multiple choice test was worth 20%. Before 1995 the multiple choice section was one of four sections and was worth 35% of the total paper; prior to 1988 the section was worth 40% of the paper. The multiple choice items selected for the paper are trialled each year and procedures outlined by Quin (1995) indicate that the whole English exam requires two working parties, one for the multiple choice section of the paper, and one for the remaining sections. There are two members representing universities and one from the school system on each working party. The working party for the multiple choice section chooses appropriate passages, constructs questions, trials the paper and redesigns the questions and distractors on the basis of trial findings. Quin points out that choosing the passages is difficult; they must be appropriate for Year 12’s, be relevant to the English course, be accessible, diverse and complex enough to produce a range of questions. Only over the past few years have guidelines been presented to item writers. They are requested to construct questions which test some literal but mainly inferential comprehension, as well as questions which focus on
students' understanding of passages and the way the passages work rhetorically, stylistically and structurally. He adds that item writing is:

essentially an intuitive process guided by a sense of what is reasonable to ask of Year 12 students and constrained by what is possible to ask about a particular passage. Judgments are made as to whether there are too many questions of a particular type or whether an important skill has been omitted. Again, however, this is largely a process of feel, rather than a systematic one (p. 62).

The passages selected, and questions constructed, are then trialled outside of Western Australia results of which are analysed by the working party in order to consider the statistics recorded in relation to each question. A correlation coefficient is used with each item to identify where areas of the population sit in relation to the choices made about questions. Quin points out "if only 10% of students choose the preferred alternative, this is expected to be the top 10% of students" (64). He adds: "Generally an item is considered suitable if the preferred alternative is the only alternative with a positive correlation and it discriminates between students in a consistent manner" (p. 65). Because of the limitations of quantitative measurement, statistical analysis of students' results as a product of reading, does not reveal the way readers themselves interpret the text, questions and choices. The task for readers is compounded because they must also make sense of the panel's interpretation of the texts, questions and choices. Therefore the complex negotiations of these reading practices can not be adequately investigated through quantitative measurement. The infrastructure of this reading process is best illustrated through the following model which illustrates the negotiations which occur when a student makes meaning of the multiple text structures in a multiple choice test:
Reader uses strategies to assist comprehension of text - prediction, inferencing, elaboration, checking the text, reference to text, distractor reasoning, inferring influences, summarising meaning and knowledge of values and how they construct texts as described by the English syllabus and shaped by social practices of the classroom.
The model attempts to highlight the complex process of comprehending a multiple choice reading test. It endeavours to demonstrate the relationship which exists between the reader, writer, item writers and the texts. Comprehension not only requires interpretation of the passages included in the test but also text included by the item writers, namely the questions asked and the alternative choices to the questions. These questions and alternative answers underpin the item writers’ negotiated meaning of the text and must be interpreted by the reader in the same way to ensure successful results. The students’ negotiation of meaning also includes predicting how to read the passage according to the way the item writers constructed their meaning.

Figure 1. illustrates how all meaning relates back to the ideologies which underpin the way the society operates through the macro socio-cultural political context. The micro political, socio-cultural constructs relate more closely to the reader’s family and more immediate social influences. These macro and micro political, socio-cultural constructs influence both the readers and the item writers but not necessarily in the same way. The ‘successful’ making of meaning of the text therefore, is not just reliant on the words from the text of the passage but the complex relationship which exists between the text of the questions, the text of the choices, the text of the passage, the way the item writers interpret this relationship and the ability of the students to interpret this complex relationship in the same way as the item writers. The way the components of the relationship presented in Figure 1 operate interdependently and interactively to shape the meaning the reader makes of the text, means there is unlikely to be acceptance of universal meaning of the passage. It is further influenced by the intentions and theory underpinning subject English which are not congruous with the theory supporting multiple choice reading tests. Readers may have to work against the theoretical instruction of English teachers who have indicated

1 Passages refers to text of passages
Questions refers to text of questions
Distractors refers to text of distractors
the importance of understanding the polemic structures underpinning all language in order to make similar choices to those of the test makers.

Descriptive/Analytical Paradigm

Every year after students sit the examination, statistical evidence is provided by the Western Australian Secondary Education Authority. The statistical analysis made available to schools reveals items which were more successful for some students than others, how each student compared with the rest of the school’s population, and on a wider scale, the way each school population performed in relation to the rest of the students in the state (results however, are only released about the individual’s performance to the particular school the students attended). This analysis does not however, give insight into the process students move through to negotiate their preferred choices.

Since the purpose of the study was to find out how students made choices when taking a multiple choice reading test, exploring the processes students used when comprehending the test would indicate the different ways students went about answering the questions. To examine these reading practices, categorisation of the processes students used when making their choices was considered to be crucial for the research questions to be answered; therefore the descriptive/analytical design was considered an appropriate way to explore the students’ use of strategies.

Qualitative research embodies data which is well-grounded, abundant in description and enables clarification of processes in particular contexts (Miles & Huberman, 1984). It enables a rich understanding which is lacking in other approaches and activates in-depth investigation of the subject of the study.
In order to establish how students make choices, it is necessary to include the processes involved in negotiating the multiple choice texts. The processes are complex and require an understanding of how students deal with the information they are given and what they subsequently do with it. In exploring and analysing the processes students move through when comprehending a multiple choice comprehension test, the position from which a student reads a text is of rudimentary importance. The definition underpinning this study needed to be all encompassing, at a micro and macro level of text interpretation; it needed to recognise the interactive relationship which takes place within the reader and between the reader and the text. Judith Irwin’s (1991) definition of reading comprehension seeks to establish the intricacies surrounding the reader negotiating meaning with a text:

Comprehension can be seen as the process of using one’s own prior experiences and the writer’s cues to construct a set of meanings that are useful to the individual reader reading in a specific context. This process can involve understanding and selectively recalling ideas in individual sentences (micro processes), inferring relationships between clauses and sentences (integrative processes), organising ideas around summarising ideas (macro processes), and making inferences not necessarily intended by the author (elaborative processes). These processes work together (interactive hypothesis) and can be controlled and adjusted by the reader as required by the reader’s goals (metacognitive processes) and the total situation in which comprehension is occurring (situational context). When a reader consciously selects a process for a specific purpose, that process is called a reading strategy (p.9).
Because reading theorists emerge from different theoretical positions it is
difficult to find definitions which link the social and the cognitive domains. As it was
considered important to establish a definition of comprehension to underpin the study
which merged the cognitive and social domains, Irwin’s definition of comprehension
was selected. Irwin’s definition emanates from the psycholinguistic paradigm, and
therefore tends to focus on the cognitive domain of comprehension. However,
although not specifically based on a socio-cultural view of reading, the definition
provided by Irwin implicitly acknowledges the way reading practices are shaped by
socio-cultural practices. This is apparent in the way it recognises the role of elaboration
in reading and the way it can affect the interpretation of the text. Thus the definition
implicitly highlights the inadequacies of reading theories which assume the notion of
universality of language and provides a suitable basis for discussing the cognitive and
social processes which influence reading.

**Using Think-Out-Loud Protocols**

Think-out loud protocols (TOL)\(^2\) provide researchers with a method of
assessing the cognitive strategies used by readers as they negotiate meaning.
Metacognitive theorists suggest this is an effective way of finding out what students do
when they read (Brown, 1980; Rowe, 1988; Meichenbaum, 1986). The recording and
analysis of the verbalisation of what is ‘going on’ in a person’s head when they are
directed to answer particular questions is central to conducting think-out loud
procedures. Therefore, TOL protocols were chosen for the study as a suitable
analytical tool which would be used in order to account for the complexities of reading,
and to establish the examination of how students read multiple choice reading tests.

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2. Think-Out-Loud protocols to be referred to as TOL in this document.
metacognitive strategies whilst reading (Irwin, 1991; Brown, 1980; Rowe, 1988; Cullen, 1991). The importance of knowing how to employ these strategies is most important in the reading process. To employ these metacognitive strategies however depends on the way an individual processes the information from a text. This processing of information is influenced by the way the reader is inducted into reading practices, through the social practices around them, and implies there is a connection between the cognitive and social domains of reading. There is a need for close analysis in order to make judgements about which methods and strategies are used by readers and to what extent differing social constructions shape the way the reader uses these strategies. The relationship between these two domains is not mutually exclusive; one affects the other and the interdependence of each domain manipulates each reader in different ways. TOL protocols enable a researcher to tease out the intricacies of the relationship and enable rich investigation of the complex relationship between the two domains.

Often in the teaching of metacognitive skills social background is not considered (Meichenbaum, 1986; Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 1991), reinforcing the idea that all students should have access to the same set of metacognitive strategies. Making assumptions about all readers emerging with the same preferred reading of a text, suggests that the way we think and reason information through is the same, and that if we are attuned to the requirements of a particular reading practice, we may be able to direct the processing of information to arrive at a predetermined meaning. However, if we engage with a text through a particular socio-cultural frame, success may be limited even when we use reading strategies that are found effective in other reading situations. Learning to read involves learning to use metacognitive skills not only with texts but with the world from which texts emerge. “Learning is largely an information processing activity in which information about the structure of behaviour and about
environmental events is transformed into symbolic representations that serve as guides for action” (Bandura, 1986, p.51).

An important aspect of TOL is the process of elaboration which is a metacognitive strategy. Schunk (1991) points out that elaboration facilitates learning because it is a form of rehearsal which enables information to remain active in working memory, and which increases the likelihood of it being permanently stored in long term memory. To be able to elaborate allows readers to link old and new information. He also adds however, that students elaborate using different sets of schemata which may not match a predetermined meaning. This skill, although very important for the individual in making meaning, often emerges as a problem in multiple choice reading comprehension tests unless the students possess the same elaborative thinking structures as the item writers who construct the test.

The TOL methodology was chosen for the study as it enables analysis of reading practices. Because the Literature Review suggests reading is a social practice the social shaping of a reader’s knowledge was of particular interest in the study. The significance of the social construction of the individual emerges as a pivotal force in the operative processes between working memory and the activation of schemata in long term memory, in order to comprehend text. If we consider the production and consumption of texts as similar to the transactions which occur between people during conversation, what is negotiated between the two parties in conversation bears a striking resemblance to the negotiations which occur between writer, reader and text during reading. To activate what is going on in the mind of the reader allows access to what leads people to make particular readings. This further serves to reiterate the complex relationship between the cognitive strategies employed by the reader in an attempt to negotiate the meaning of social domains from which the cognition emerges.
Analysing the information being processed between working memory and long
term memory during reading enables researchers to gain more insights into the way
information is processed when readers attempt to negotiate meaning. Think-out-loud
protocols (TOL) are used to study the higher level cognitive processes: predictions,
inferences and elaborations that occur whilst reading (Olsen, Duffy & Mack, 1984;
revealed that the reader’s knowledge of the world, both physical and social, was crucial
in controlling the reader’s thought processes whilst reading a text. They point out that
TOL data communicates the knowledge sources, the various representations of the
writer, the hypotheses formed and the kinds of strategies used by readers endeavouuring
to integrate the semantic representation of text into the various cognitive structures
constructed during comprehension. It enables examination of student reading
behaviours that can only occur if reading is viewed as a process rather than a product of
the text.

As TOL is integral to this study it is important to review how it works to
uncover the deeper layer of ‘meaning making’ by readers involved in the
comprehension process. Newell and Simon (1972) contend it facilitates study of
individual differences in higher level cognitive skills and identifies readers of varying
levels of skill and background knowledge. However, what may be occurring between
the interaction of working and long term memory at a particular point in time will not be
revealed by TOL discussions; this has to be inferred by the researcher after close
analysis of transcripts. For effective analysis of TOL protocols, subjects must be asked
what reflections they made about the focus questions in close proximity to their reading
of the selected text. The further removed reflections are from the reading of the text the
less effective the TOL data analysis (Olsen et al. 1984). It is important to note that the
interpretation by the researcher of what happens in the interaction between working and
long term memory is a limitation of the TOL procedure. It must be acknowledged by the researcher that the protocol is an interactive procedure, not merely an unmediated representation of what is in the mind of the reader.

Metacognition has emerged, in recent times, as a leading player in improving comprehension skills in many teachers' programmes over recent years. For this reason, teachers use TOL strategies in the classroom daily: deconstructing sections of text for student investigation, encouraging students to reflect how predictions have been affirmed or corrected, and motivating them to predict, infer and elaborate to uncover the rich textual layers from what is being read. Students moving through texts in this way begin to connect the micro to the macro layers and thus emerge with the higher order cognitive skills which cannot be identified qualitatively in a multiple choice reading test in which the text and the deemed 'correct' answer are the final authority.

In order to use TOL protocols effectively students need a level of metalinguistic awareness to be able to demonstrate the ability to deal with language reflectively and consciously. Stauffer (1975) points out that this expertise in comprehending develops slowly as a child's language develops. "The shift from the intuitive, non-conscious use of language to conscious, reflective use is gradual" (p.19). Students therefore at sixteen and seventeen (the age of taking multiple choice reading tests which affect literacy outcomes as far as university entrance or paid employment is concerned) should have in place the higher order processing skills needed to conduct TOL protocols effectively. It needs to be recognised however, that poor metalinguistic awareness amongst some students, may influence the outcomes of using this analytical tool.

Qualitative design requires observation of participants, collection of data and the formulation of categories to describe the outcomes of the investigative work. The use
of TOL procedures in the study was considered an effective way of analysing the strategies used by students in selecting answers to multiple choice questions as well as ascertaining the cultural framing which led them to make their selections. Thus it was decided to use selected passages from previous TEE papers, asking students to read passages, select an answer to the questions and to tape record these responses as well as their reflections on how choices were made.

Through analysis and categorisation of students’ responses, that is, asking them their preferred answer and how they were led to make such conclusions, comment could be made about the influence of background knowledge on interpretation, the relationship assumed with the writer, the test items, and the methods and strategies used to negotiate their preferred answers.
CHAPTER FOUR

DESIGN OF STUDY

Research Setting and Participants

My interest in exploring the way students processed information in multiple choice reading tests arose from three areas: analysing the statistics provided by the SEA; teachers' discussions about their students' lack of performance in the section of the examination; and teachers' concerns that this section of the examination was not in the spirit of the syllabus they were teaching. My own observations of students whose reading practices led them to perform badly in multiple choice reading tests confirmed the above concerns of the teachers. These observations indicated there were students who achieved excellent results in other aspects of subject English and scored poorly in multiple choice reading tests, whilst others scored reasonably well in these tests and performed badly in other areas of the subject. It was therefore important to identify the reading behaviours of particular graded groups to consider whether this notion in relation to performance was explicitly revealed in the study. Gillet and Temple (1990) have previously confirmed findings about low achieving students out-performing high achieving candidates.

It was considered essential, in order to carry out this study, that a significant number of students be interviewed to allow reasonable generalised conclusions to be drawn from the study. In light of this, a clustered, stratified sampling of forty eight students was selected. In the interests of investigating whether or not there were differences in reading practices relating to gender, twenty four boys and twenty four girls were chosen as participants. These girls and boys were representative of the
A, B, C and D grades in English in order to consider whether students from differently graded groups taking the test used different strategies in answering multiple choice reading tests. Having students in the study representing particular grades would perhaps shed light on performance in the multiple choice test in relation to performance in other aspects of the subject. Teachers were asked to select students representing the A, B, C and D grades in subject English. As all schools put in place grade related descriptors recommended by the Secondary Education Authority and moderation visits to schools ensure results are comparable from school to school, the represented grades were taken as a reasonable indicator of students' performance in the subject.

To ensure a wide selection representing various social backgrounds from the student community, students were selected from seven metropolitan high schools: two private schools and five government schools. Theoretical underpinnings of the study rested with the idea of "thought" as a sociological construct; it was therefore important for a broad socio economic distribution to be included in the sampling. In selecting students from a range of socio economic areas, observations might be made about the reader's positioning in relation to the content put forward in the passages to be read by the students.

Research took place in October and November, so it was not feasible to include Year 12 students in the study as they were preparing for final examinations and all schools did not consider it suitable to interrupt revision programmes. As it would be only months before Year 11 students would embark on their final year studies and would encounter tests similar to the one used in this study, it was considered more appropriate by all concerned to involve Year 11 students.

Verbal permission was granted by Heads of English Departments in the schools
approached, and the reasons for investigating the reading practices of students taking multiple choice tests and the procedure for doing so, was described. A letter detailing the study (see Appendix A, B and C) was then sent to all principals, teachers concerned, intended participants and guardians of intended participants. Written permission was granted from all concerned. Once permission had been granted, letters were then sent to the students outlining the procedure on the day of the interview and the time and place to meet the researcher (see Appendix D). To maintain anonymity, pseudonyms have been given to students described in the study. All parties were advised that all information gathered would remain confidential to the researcher and university. An assurance of anonymity was given to all parties. Audio tapes were to be kept for five years.

**Procedure**

Interviews were carried out in each of the schools in seminar rooms where only the participant and myself were located. On arrival at the interview I made students feel as comfortable as was possible in a contrived situation, and explained that if there were discomfort at any stage, they were free to discontinue with proceedings. Most students were compliant with the arrangements and seemed fairly eager to be involved in the interview. I explained that the interview protocol would involve them answering two questions:

- Why did you make the selection?
- What led you to make the selection?

They were asked to read three passages taken from 1990, 1991 and 1992 TEE papers (see Appendix E, F and G) and make selections from the choices given and
explain how they arrived at selecting their choices. Students would read one passage and then answer each question explaining to the interviewer how and why they selected their preferred choice. The students would go on to answer the remaining questions from the passage, and then begin the same procedure with a new passage.

A recording device was placed on the table alongside the student and I took notes as unobtrusively as possible. In most cases students discussed their responses freely; very few students needed prompting to respond and because I was attempting to avoid leading the students in any particular direction, I prompted only by repeating the questions outlined to them early in the interview process, namely: why they made a particular selection and how they arrived at that choice. All students in the study responded positively and those who were unsure why and how they arrived at their choice generally indicated that it "just seemed to be the right answer". At the conclusion of the passages students were asked some general questions regarding the way they read the passages, what they generally thought of multiple choice reading tests and whether they considered them to be a good indicator of their ability in the subject. I did not discuss with the student, concerns about the incongruous nature of the test in relation to the rest of the English course because it was important to maintain an impartial view about this aspect of the study when conducting the TOL procedure. Each interview took approximately one and a half hours to complete.

**Pilot Study**

Prior to October and November 1993 two pilot studies were conducted. Both pilot studies used passages which were in previous TEE English examinations but were not those which were finally selected for the study. Irwin's (1991) definition of comprehension processing acted as a guide for creating initial categories for analysis.
These categories included the role of elaboration and inferencing and whether the reader referred specifically to the text (at this stage I defined the text as the passage in question). The importance of the texts of question/answer relationships and how these relationships influenced the readers' strategies and methods was yet to emerge as an important part of the data. I also used the first pilot study as a means to create further categories through observing the reading practices of the participants. The purpose of establishing the initial categories was to determine whether or not the TOL strategy would provide data required; enable a refinement of the procedure and provide further categories for analysis of the data. Through analysis of the TOL data in the pilot studies, I made further observations which uncovered more possible categories.

The pilot study involved two sixteen year old students who were asked to read two passages and discuss why they chose certain answers. From this, I began coding the methods and strategies used by the students when making decisions about their preferred choices. To support this, a further study was conducted with six literacy educators (three males and three females). This was done to determine whether mature readers, who were considered to possess expert comprehension skills, indicated other categories that were not present in the adolescent readers. Further categories were found, and others revealed in the first study, were supported.

It also became evident, in the second pilot study, with the literacy educators, that expert readers do not necessarily score very highly in multiple choice reading tests. Lively discussions were entered into by participants in the second pilot study to justify preferred choices. Reflection and evaluation of the second pilot study indicated the role played by the reader's social positioning and the way this shaped the rationalisation of the choices they made. Both individual and group discussions with these literacy educators and myself allowed opportunity for deeper understanding of reasons why
particular choices did not fit preferred readings of the test makers. The conclusions drawn from the second pilot study enabled me to code responses into particular categories, but because the study was descriptive and analytical, other categories for the data were expected to emerge as the data were analysed and re-analysed.

It was also discovered after discussion with the second pilot study group that these expert readers interpreted the questions differently from each other and the test constructors. Some of these readers thought questions required them to use inferential information from the text whilst others believed questions required them to use scriptual information from outside the text. It became clear that differences in the way readers interpreted the question, in turn affected the way they responded to the choices provided by the item writers. The readers found it difficult to decide whether each question asked by the item writers and the choices of alternatives available, concentrated on the answer being implicit in the content of the passage, or whether it relied more on the scriptual information within their own schemata. I decided that it would facilitate categorisation of students' reading behaviours if an attempt was made to categorise the question/answer relationships the item writers had deemed 'correct'. The idea was to categorise them according to their textual explicitness, textual implicitness or scriptual implicitness (explained more fully on p.83) as described by Pearson and Johnson (1978). By attempting to categorise the question/answer relationships when students verbalised their responses, it was hoped to help clarify how students tended to rely on different information than that used by the item writers or information from their own schemata.

Data Collected

Throughout the study and during the administration of the interviews conducted
according to the TOL procedure, data were collected in the form of:

**Test Passages**

Passages were taken from the 1990, 1991 and 1992 papers. It was important to have a broad selection of genres and for the content to be accessible to the students. A speech extract "Teaching Whites a Lesson" was chosen from 1990; a narrative extract "Mr Reginald Peacock's Day" from 1991 and a magazine extract "Ruins Without Value" from 1992. The questions were representative of what students would usually find in a TEE English examination.

**Answer Keys**

Answer keys were used to identify the number of correct answers made by the students in the study. These answer keys were made by the item writers and up until 1995 were published every year, a few months after students sat their English examination for TEE (see Appendix H, I and J).

**Statewide Analysis of Results from the English Examinations for 1990, 1991 and 1992**

Statistical results were analysed to identify how many of the student population in the study made the same type of choices as students taking the test in 1990, 1991 and 1992. Identification of percentages of the distractor choices students preferred, as well as correct answers, which are all recorded in these results, enabled comparisons to be drawn between the study group and the students who took the test in 1990, 1991 and 1992 (see Appendix K, L and M).
TOL Data

Students' think-out-loud responses to 34 questions taken from the 1990, 1991 and 1992 TEE English papers were collected. Students were asked to explain why they made their preferred choice and what led them to arrive at this choice. Their responses were recorded on audio tape. Students' responses were later transcribed. Each session took approximately one and a half hours. See Appendix N for an example of TOL Data at interview. The following is an example of a TOL response. This question was taken from the 1990 paper from the extract “Teaching Whites a Lesson”

Q.24 The first paragraph implies that the major distinction between white society and Aboriginal society is that

(a) white society values material wealth while aboriginal society values social justice.

(b) white society is competitive while Aboriginal society is co-operative.

(c) white society believes in teaching facts, while Aboriginal society is concerned with teaching values.

(d) white society relies on technological expertise while Aboriginal society relies on myth and tradition.

The correct answer is A.

The TOL is from a Male C level student in a single sex private school;

I can't work out the answer - from what I can see it is - A from my general knowledge is true but this isn't pushed out in the passage. I would choose B - C does come out
but not as strong. A, C and D are fairly close - no - contradict myself - read this again - put B - other three are weak - yes - B comes out stronger. The evidence of Aborigines are saying we can benefit you - you are competitive with us and you don’t have to be. They are all probably it but I choose B.

Researcher’s Notes

Whilst students were engaged in reading the passages and in the TOL procedure, I took notes relating to their reading practices. The observer notes were especially useful in noting the students’ attention, mannerisms, non-verbal action and attitudinal response to the task set. I also noted down apparent strategies or difficulties experienced by the student. After transcribing the tapes I was able to draw conclusions about other strategies chosen by students in order to choose their preferred responses.
CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The descriptive analytical focus of the study demanded a form of processing data which was suitable for the naturalistic inquiry paradigm. Guba (1981) points out that in conducting such an inquiry researchers must ensure confidence in their findings which must be applicable in other contexts and with other subjects; the consistency must be established from one setting to another and the biases, motivations and perspectives of the inquirer must not lead the study. Naturalistic inquiry involves intensive data collection to ensure that validity, reliability and objectivity are guaranteed. Researchers use qualitative methods, such as participant observer, in-depth interviewing, non-verbal cues, documentary and records analysis in an attempt to identify behaviour of participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

For the purpose of this study the constant comparative method was used to analyse the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stipulate analysis begins early in the study and is nearly completed at the end of the data collection: the data is collected, the interview takes place, then analysis of data and development of theory, more interviews and more analysis, until the research is completed.

The constant comparative method allows the development of grounded theory and categorisation of behaviours to be tested against the data collected. The researcher must put forward alternatives, considering why some behaviours may not be catered for by the developing theory. Wilson (1977) asserts that there are critical aspects of
behaviour which may be difficult to understand:

The qualitative researcher learns of some of these perspectives by hearing participants express them in a flow of events. To learn of others, the researcher must ask participants questions and become acquainted with “emic” (actor-relevant) categories that are rarely expressed. Some of what we are calling perspectives or meanings, however, may not even be conscious for the participants; no participant could spontaneously articulate them. (p.p.252-253).

The researcher therefore defines and redefines the theory as more data are collected. Bogden and Biklen (1982) outline useful steps in order to develop theory and analyse data:

• begin data collection
• consider key issues, recurrence of behaviours or events which could become categories
• consider the diversity or dimensions which may occur under the categories formed
• record categories, describing and accounting for all incidents in the data whilst looking for new incidents
• consider social processes and relationships in the data and developing model
• sample, code and write about the categories.

Before commencing the data collection, the passages that were going to be used in the study were carefully considered and three were finally chosen, representative of the different years: 1990, 1991 and 1992. It was considered important that the passages to be used were accessible in understanding to the majority of the students and
represented a wide selection of genre. A range of genre is always included in the TEE English paper and it was important to describe and analyse reading practices which did not only focus on the reading of fiction or non-fiction texts alone; extracts from texts representing the speech, prose and magazine article genre were therefore included. After selecting the passages and reading them numerous times to consider the alternative interpretations that could emerge I asked three reading professionals, who had agreed to be member checkers, to read the proposed texts and consider the way they had been shaped by the proposed texts.

These member checkers were experienced teachers: two represented the secondary school system and had taught English at TEE level for many years. They were both familiar with reading texts from alternative positions. The remaining member checker was a primary school language specialist who had just completed a Master of Education. This member checker fully understood and enacted, practices to assist early readers in developing comprehension skills, and was fully conversant with reading from a psycholinguistic perspective. I believed it was important that they cognitive angle on reading comprehension was needed to balance the social aspects of reading in the study and therefore sought to engage a member checker who could provide this sense of equilibrium. The basic skills required to decode meaning tend to be omitted in secondary school English classes as it is expected students have mastered these skills by the time they reach upper secondary level. There are, however, many students who need to refine these skills.

In order to consider how reading practices are manipulated when taking a multiple choice test, member checkers were also asked to read the selected passages for the study. I believed it was most important they were fully conversant with the different ways they could be positioned by the texts. So I invited them to undertake a
further study before data was checked by them. They were at first requested to read the
passages only, make their own reading and then record by means of a written response
what they considered were the central concerns of the passages. They were required to
do this before any attempt was made to read the questions and the possible answers
constructed by the item writers. In doing this they could form their own interpretation
without being manipulated by the question/answer relationships constructed by the item
writers. After this first reading, they were then asked to read the passages again, along
with the questions and answers. It was at this point they located what they believed
were the ‘correct’ answers. After doing this, there were discussions about the degree
of manipulation, and the way the second reading of the passages confirmed or altered
original readings. The results of these discussions indicated that the original meaning,
owned by each individual member checker, was altered to some extent, and that in
reading and interpreting the questions and possible answers, they were manipulated, to
take on a position which did not necessarily support their original reading. These
results revealed the importance of the relationship between the questions and possible
answers in framing responses in multiple choice questions. This confirmed similar
evidence found in the pilot study.

**Coding the Question/Answer Relationships**

It was therefore strategic for me to pre-code the question/answer relationships
deemed correct by the test constructors of the passages before conducting the
interviews. Pearson and Johnson’s (1978) categorisation of question/answer
relationships was used to facilitate this coding.
Table 5.1. Approaches to Question/Answer Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textually Explicit</th>
<th>Textually Implicit</th>
<th>Scriptually Implicit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Code: TE</td>
<td>Code: TI</td>
<td>Code: SI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If both the question and the answer are derivable from the text and if the relation between the question and the answer was explicitly cued by the language of the text</td>
<td>If both the question and the answer are derivable from the text but there is no logical or grammatical cue tying the question to the answer in the light of the question</td>
<td>Whenever a plausible non textual response is given to a question derivable from the text (reading beyond the lines)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Pearson & Johnson 1978, p.p.163 - 164)

The Pearson and Johnson categories offered an excellent starting point for analysis. Students' responses indicated interpretation was directed towards these three areas, and that the categories often worked together interdependently. Students tended to directly articulate a connection to the text in their responses, or believed from the information they were given, the answer was implied in the text, whereas other questions resulted in students having to move outside the text in order to make sense of the questions and possible answers. It must be pointed out that this pre-coding presents a limitation to the study, as it was influenced by my own interpretation of the way I believed the item writers possibly interpreted the passages, constructed the questions and arrived at the ‘correct’ answers. Pre-coding the question/answer
relationships of the correct answers later facilitated the categorisation of the students' responses according to the relationships between the question and the chosen answer. Because I had the correct answers, identification of the way the test constructors expected the students to respond to particular question/answer relationships could be used to analyse the way students selected responses in relation to the questions. By identifying how the students responded to the expected categorisation of the question/answer relationships, it enabled me to further investigate where and why differences of interpretation occurred, as well as whether different methods and strategies were used when different question/answer relationships were chosen.

Through the analysis of the interview transcripts, and my written notes about non-verbal behaviour, reading behaviour and verb responses, categories which included some of the behaviours described by Irwin, as well as some other categories emerged. The initial categories which emerged are described below.

**The Answers Students Chose**

- correct answers
- distractor choice

**The Way Students Chose Their Answers**

- elimination of choices
- contemplation of choices
- a combined approach of eliminating and contemplating
- making a calculated choice
- random choice
Observations Made About Reading Behaviours

- checking the text
- making reference to the text
- elaborating information
- inferring influences
- reasoned through distractors
- generalised the meaning
- vocabulary

These categories above will be defined and analysed in full detail in a later chapter.

The Level of Modality of Student Answers

- Strong
- Medium
- Weak

The Level of Metalinguistic Understanding

- strong
- medium
- weak

The modality category related to the strength of the responses of students and was dependent on the language used in the TOL data and the level of confidence with which students responded.

The metalinguistic category linked closely to the strength of students' metacognitive skills. It related to their ability to discuss their understanding of the way language operated in the texts and the way this connected to their general understanding.
of the way language works in society.

The Way the Initial Categories Were Defined

The categorisation of the question/answer relationships was employed in order to facilitate the future coding of students' responses in the study. Pearson and Johnson (1978) indicate that questions, which on the surface appear simple, may in fact require a complex set of inferences by the reader which involves the integration of textual and scriptual information. They believe "students who do not possess the requisite scriptual information or who are deficient in their power to draw logical inferences between text segments will not be able to respond accurately to questions without explicit answers in the text" (p.165). They add that in constructing a test you do not always get the type of comprehension you may have anticipated and that even in the most explicit type of question/answers, there will be students who employ scriptual information.

The other categories (pages 85 & 86) were later refined and some were deleted. After re-reading the responses I began to feel doubtful about the metalinguistic and modality categories. Even though analysis of the transcripts appeared to show strong, medium or weak metalinguistic awareness, I considered the category to be too subjective, as it relied on my own intuitive feelings of how well students articulated their understandings of their own strategic reading behaviours. However, from my own observations and recorded notes, it appeared students displayed differing levels of understanding of the way language works in texts. The level of this understanding often linked closely to the way the question/answer relationships positioned them to select an alternative.
The modality categories, which related to the degree of certainty in the verbalisation of students' responses, also seemed questionable. It appeared during interviews that some students were able to articulate confidently, the way they processed information, whilst others were less confident in articulating what they did. However, the ability of students to articulate their preferences did not necessarily relate to their success in answering questions. The modality of students' responses was therefore considered to be an unreliable category and was dropped from the coding system. It was not used as a major category in the analysis of students' strategies in the study, but was retained in the study as a means to describe the reading behaviours of some of the differently graded students.

The categories for coding the question/answer relationships appeared to indicate that students employed different strategies when interpreting the question/answer relationships in textually explicit, textually implicit or scriptually implicit ways. The question/answer relationship categories therefore remained a central focus of the study.

Validity and Reliability

Validity

The following strategies were used in this study to ensure credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Triangulation of Data and Methods

The data were examined from multiple sources; recorded transcripts, field notes, debriefing sessions and results from statewide examinations.
The results from students in the study were compared with statewide statistics from 1990, 1991 and 1992. A high correlation between results in the study group and students who sat the examination in 1990, 1991 and 1992 was recorded.

**Member Checking**

Discussions about the data and categories with member checkers and re-analysing of original categorisation of methods and strategies ensured validity.

**Peer Examination**

Data relating to interpretation of texts was periodically checked by peers who also contributed to the analysis by providing alternative meanings of texts.

**Reliability**

It was important that results could be transferred to another setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) therefore twenty five per cent of transcribed student responses were randomly divided and analysed by three member checkers. Of the three member checkers, one held the same reservations as myself about the metalinguistic and modality categories and one remained unsure. It was therefore agreed, that at this stage the two questionable categories would remain a focus in the study until the data was further analysed. The remaining categories were unanimously supported, including the question/answer codings, and no further categories emerged from the de-briefing session with the member checkers and myself.

After final analysis of the data, twelve months after member checking, I
eliminated the questionable categories due to initial concerns about linking the metalinguistic awareness category and modality categories to success in the test. The results of students' responses in relation to the modality category, although not directly relating to their success in using strategies to get the right answers, indicated gender differences in reading behaviours, so was kept within the confines of the study as a means of describing and comparing particular reading behaviours. The metalinguistic awareness category indicated a limitation of the study and will be discussed more fully in a later chapter. It emphasised a student’s ability or inability to articulate the way language operated in a text and the ability to describe the processes they used to reach their conclusions. When students did not verbalise thoughts in relation to this category at interview, it became difficult to draw conclusions about the methods and strategies being used because of the internalised process of comprehension. It was therefore considered too subjective to make judgements about a student’s metalinguistic awareness.

**Final Categories**

After further analysis, three months after the redefinition of categories, a functionally valid set of categories emerged which would serve to answer the research questions. Categories were grouped and coded under the following headings and defined as:

**The Answer Choices:**

**Correct Answers (CA)** the students selected the choice deemed correct by item writers.

**Distractor Choice (DC)** the students chose the distractor that most students chose
in the statewide results from the particular year (1990, 1991 or 1992) from which the passage was used.

The Way the Students Approached the Question/Answer Relationships:

**Textually Explicit (TE)** the students indicated that the answer to the question was to be found literally in the text.

**Textually Implicit (TI)** the students indicated that the question implied that the answer would be found implicitly in the content of the text.

**Scriptually Implicit (SI)** the students indicated that the question could be interpreted in more than one way and could lead the readers to rely more heavily on their own schemata in order to arrive at an answer.

The Methods Used to Make Choices about Preferred Answers:

**Elimination (E)** the students verbally indicated that they eliminated the other choices before arriving at their choice.

**Contemplation (C)** the students verbally indicated contemplation of all the choices and then chose the one they thought fitted the question the best.

**Elimination/Contemplation (E/C)** the students verbally indicated elimination of a couple of distractors and then contemplated the remaining ones before making a choice.

**Calculated Choice (CC)** students made a calculated choice without verbally indicating how they made the choice.

**Random (R)** the students had no idea what the answer was, so made a random choice. They indicated this in their verbal response.
Metacognitive Strategies Used to Process Information in Order to Negotiate Preferred Meanings:

**Reasoned Through Distractors (RD)** the students reasoned through all the distractors verbally and then made a final choice. This category is similar to elimination, but students in this category tended to offer more reasons to back up their choice.

**Vocabulary (V)** students expressed verbally their difficulty with the language in the text.

**Checked the Text (CT)** students went back to the text to check information before making a response.

**Referred to Text (RT)** students made specific verbal reference to the text when discussing their answer.

**Inferred Influences (I)** students inferred verbally how they were influenced to make a decision (either through textual detail or from factors outside the text).

**Elaboration (EL)** students indicated verbally their use of imagination by placing themselves vicariously into the text, as well as expressing ideas from their own experience to help them negotiate the choice they finally made.

**Generalised the Meaning (GM)** students tended to summarise verbally the overall meaning they extracted from their reading of the passage, in terms of how they saw it, as well as how they thought they were supposed to read it, and related their responses and the distractor choices to this understanding.

The results of these strategies and the approaches students used to negotiate meaning with the question/answer relationships will be examined in the next chapter.
When I first started examining the students' responses, it was not my intention to analyse the data statistically because the study was focussed on describing how students answer multiple choice comprehension questions. I was, in fact, ideologically opposed to conducting such testing because it emerges from a paradigm which I consider unsuitable for testing the reading comprehension skills of students. However, as much as I desired the removal of this section of the multiple choice section from the TEE English examination, if it was destined to remain, I was determined to find out whether it was possible to establish whether if some approaches, methods or strategies did in fact emerge as success markers on which teachers could focus in the classroom in order to prepare students for this section of the exam. For this reason I decided to conduct chi square testing of some of the categories.

For chi square testing to be done, it was necessary to use the whole population of students in the study to examine the difference in use of methods and strategies and their success rates. The population of the sub-groups (differently graded, gender) needed to be larger in order to analyse the responses of these sub-groups using the chi square test. However, there were some methods and strategies which were used to a greater extent than others, and this allowed chi square testing to be conducted with some of the sub-groups. Therefore, the more often the strategy was used, the more likely that the testing was dependable enough to produce results from which generalised assumptions could be made.

Few categories emerged which revealed that the use of these strategies resulted in a significant success rate. These markers of significance also reveal that statistics can often conceal more than reveal, and do not embody all variables which influence
respondents to be placed in the categories in the first place. So, although chi square results present interesting insights into the question/answer relationships and the methods and strategies used by students, the tests could not be used to make generalisations about consistent success in multiple choice reading tests.

Chi-square testing revealed a statistical significance at 1 degree of freedom at 0.05 probability favouring the textually implicit approach to answering questions. What this means is that the more students were able to make textual implications about question/answer relationships instead of scriptual implications, the more likely they were to be successful. This result is indeed 'significant' for teachers in the classroom because it reveals that teaching practices which endorse the use of the students' own experiences and schemata in order to negotiate meaning, will not necessarily serve them well in a multiple choice reading test. There are other implications which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Other results which emerged as statistically significant revealed gender differences in the reading practices of the students in this study. In the overall population of students there was a statistical significant difference at 3 degrees of freedom at 0.05 probability which favoured the way females used the calculated choice strategy in order to answer questions successfully. This result is questionable as the strategy itself reveals a limitation in the study and will be discussed in a later section.

When comparing the strategies of male and female students two categories emerged revealing significant difference in success rates. Statistical difference at 1 degree of freedom at 0.05 probability revealed that the strategies elaboration and generalised the meaning favoured males in getting answers right, whilst female students were significantly better at checking the text as a strategy to arrive at the correct
answer. These results will also be discussed fully in the next chapter.

Although it was interesting to conduct the statistical testing, it reinforced my own convictions about its limitations, as the many interacting variables which stem from the social construction of meaning could not be fully examined or included in a mathematical formula being used on the social behavioural patterns of readers that were being observed and noted down by a researcher.
CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Introduction

It has become more apparent in the ‘political’ construction of ideological principles generally, that the society in which we live is endeavouring to endorse pluralism. In westernised societies, we are being encouraged to see and accept different ways of living and perceiving the world. Understanding that there is not just one truth in relation to interpreting the world around us, embodies political, social and cultural interactions in every day life. My job as researcher was to analyse the discussions of the students’ responses to the questions as well as the item writers’ construction of the text, questions and answers. This chapter, is therefore, my interpretative analysis of these texts and it is shaped by my social, political and cultural views.

The English syllabus for TEE candidates in Western Australia, over past years, has moved towards getting students to understand the different meanings reproduced in texts and the way their own values contribute to the meanings they make. As the shift has gained momentum, it has become increasingly difficult to believe that there can only be one sustainable reading in a multiple choice reading test. English teachers aiming to enact syllabus documentation endeavour to point out the complexities of reading texts critically. They support teaching practices which establish the different positions readers take when constructing meaning, and how meaning is constrained by questions of morality and the structures of authority operating within society. And instead of asking students to explain what the texts they read mean, and allowing them to defend
their own preferred readings in a way that shuts out other readings, exploration of a range of possible meanings and analysis of the different interests they serve, are considered. These teaching practices enable students to understand that all meaning is partial, positioned and can often be contradictory.

Students also need to understand how teachers can serve to position them in certain ways through their own value systems as well as the ways they go about setting the task of deconstructing texts and shaping the classroom discourse. Choosing a particular paradigm from which to deconstruct texts can often block out other ways of 'seeing'. For example, if a particular teacher only emphasises a feminist reading which serves to reveal female characters as victims of patriarchal domination in deconstructing texts, it is possible the complexities of psychological female power as well as domestic power are being overlooked, even from within the same theoretical position. Other theoretical positions are rendered 'invisible' and would need to be explored before a student could confidently construct a critical position from which to read the text.

This predisposition to see things only in some ways and not others, is how a multiple choice reading test operates; it does not have the scope for complex critical analysis because it is limited in format due to being confined to one correct answer per item. As a teacher preparing students for the TEE English examination, it has concerned me that in the preparation for the multiple choice reading comprehension section, I have had great difficulty at times in justifying the 'correct choices' in practice tests I have administered. I have always been able to see other ways of reading the passage from those who have constructed the questions and correct responses. This is also amplified considerably when 'post mortems' of examinations are conducted. Often I am able to position myself as the item writers and can see how they arrived at
their preferred meaning, only to have it challenged by students' own critical reflections of the way they thought the text operated, which on most occasions has revealed students, with high order cognitive skills, who are contesting the power relations in the text.

The interview data in the study presented deconstructions of texts by students who revealed different ways of making meaning. It became more obvious to me the more I read the texts in the study and the more I read the transcripts, that meaning is not static, just as culture is not static. This fluidity of meaning reinforces the complex nature of interpreting the English language and serves to highlight that even the same reader will arrive at altered meanings the more he or she reads a text.

The problem for assessment however, is how to make judgements about a student's ability to make a critical reading. If we are to acknowledge that making meaning rests with the reader's value systems, the reader's negotiations with text and perhaps writer's intention, it is also possible to put forward the idea that a seventeen year old reader will not arrive at the same set of possibilities for meaning as "middle aged" item writers. Even when mature readers can recognise how the text is positioning them, the level of life experience which leads them to come up with a set of possible meanings will not match those of the average seventeen year old. This reaffirms the psycholinguistic reading theorists' notion that the more background knowledge a reader possesses, the less information is required from the text. This too however, is problematic. Social theorists recognise how background knowledge can peripheralise those who may not have the opportunity to gain particular background knowledge and thus see how such students can be disadvantaged or considered illiterate when being judged on any singular set of premises.
In this chapter I will discuss the results under the following headings:

- The Possible Meanings of the Passages
- Question/Answer Relationships
- Graded Students Use of Methods and Strategies
- Gender Differences
- Case Studies

**Section One**

**The Possible Meanings for the Passages Chosen for the Study**

When I chose the passages for the study the criteria for inclusion was based on the accessibility for students' understanding and the representation of a wide range of genre. The complexities of the passages became more evident as I read them over and over, read the students' transcripts many times and then read the passages again. Once another set of possible constructions of meaning was placed before me, even if I was not prepared to accept these meanings in their entirety, my original interpretation was altered. After reading through a wider range of meanings and trying to match them with the meanings preferred by the item writers, I was even further convinced about the unsuitability of the multiple choice format to make judgements about critical literacy.

The possibilities of meaning for these passages may indeed be far wider than my discussion in this study, but I will focus on the way I was positioned to construct meaning after reading the passages, the students' transcripts and the question/answer relationships. The way the item writers set up the questions and possible answers also positions readers in various ways. Many students commented that what they thought
the passage meant was not represented in the possible answers from which selection had to be made. This, therefore, positioned students to take on, resist or alter the meaning of the passage relative to the sets of possibilities which came from the questions and choices provided by the item writers. If perhaps students were asked what they thought the main intention of a particular passage was, without being influenced by the question/answer relationships, it is quite possible a wider set of readings would unfold.

It must be acknowledged that the way tone is achieved in texts is dependent on the way writers use language to create a certain effect; however readers will also negotiate the meaning of the tone in relation to the way the language sets off schemata which relate to their own set of life experiences. Questions, particularly about the tone of a text, lead readers to take up a particular reading position which influences choices they will make with other questions. This serves to highlight the way a question/answer relationship constructed by the item writers of the question and possible answers, positions the reader to agree, resist or alter their interpretation. Once ‘agreed’ or ‘resisted’ the reader goes on to add to that meaning, often resulting in a pattern of answers emerging from a particular passage when the reader gets a string of answers either correct or incorrect. The point to stress here, is that it is not necessarily a lack of critical understanding of the passage, but rather the way the reader is framed by the possible answers.

What follows is an analysis of the passages included in the study and ways of negotiating possible meanings. These passages could be deconstructed further but it would become a very lengthy analysis, and for the purposes of the study is not entirely necessary. I will refer back to the passages when analysing student responses and indicate where and how I believe they achieved or resisted alignment with the preferred
Teaching Whites a Lesson (See Appendix E)

The information preceding this extract informs students that it is a passage taken from a contribution to a collection of essays on Aboriginal history, published in Australia in 1988. The writer’s name and sex are not provided. In summary, the passage is about the contrasting value systems of white and Aboriginal Australia. This contrast is illustrated through: an examination of the writer’s position regarding Aboriginal history; the attitude of Aborigines to land rights and social justice, the writer’s feelings about white extremists being a minority; and the hope that all Australians will rally around for the Aboriginal cause.

The title of the passage is significant in framing the reading position for the text. The likely meaning of the title features in the first test question for this extract, so the answer selected by the readers will be likely to affect choices to questions later in the test. The use of “Whites” in the title may be viewed by some readers as derogatory. It is a slang term and may appear to be deliberately used by the writer as a way of placing white Australians in the same position as Aboriginal people have been placed for many years, when they have been referred to as “blacks”. However, the item writers’ preferred meaning of the title suggests that readers should see it as a way “that white Australians would benefit from the examples offered by Aboriginal people”. The meaning privileged by the item writers reinforces a certain moral order about Aborigines which is currently valued in Australia. In order to select the correct answers, readers need to be attuned to the construction of this social thought patterning and be aware of aligning themselves with this position as they analyse the text.
In answering a question about the title, readers need to contemplate the possible meanings of “Teaching Whites a Lesson”. A lesson usually means there is a situation of unequal power relations in operation; the recipient of the knowledge must accede to the authority of the teacher in order to be a successful learner. Another way of looking at this title could perhaps be linked to a situation of unequal power relations which relates to social situations where a person has been ‘done wrong’ and thus pays back the doer of the bad deed by ‘teaching him/her a lesson’. If readers seize the latter semantic pattern as an overview of meaning to the whole passage it is most unlikely they would choose a response which agrees with that of the item writers. Such a resistant meaning is sustainable, as the use of imperative language in the passage could position readers to resist the commanding sense of action when the writer calls for the reader to right the wrongs of the past.

The point of view in this passage is particularly important in establishing the tone. Students in one question are invited to choose the tone from the following choices: ‘hostile’; ‘impassioned’; ‘conciliatory’ or ‘provocative’. The correct choice is ‘conciliatory’. When exam candidates consider choosing a conciliatory tone, they would need evidence to show the writer trying to bring the two sides together. However, the linguistic evidence does not necessarily suggest this. The point of view is revealed through the ‘voice’ of the writer which appears to be active and direct, “When I went to school”; “I believe the political discussion”; “We should concentrate”. The first person singular and plural is used throughout the extract. For some readers these linguistic markers would not necessarily suggest a ‘conciliatory’ tone. As well, in order to view the text as conciliatory, a reader would need to understand the moral positioning of values privileged in present day society, to support the indigenous Australians. They would need to realise that it is not considered ‘politically correct’ to shape a negative view about Aborigines. If we take this to be the ‘naturalised’ premise
from which the item writers operated, then readers of the passage who hold a different set of life experiences and values, or rely more heavily on the linguistic markers of the text, will not arrive at the correct answer and will be considered to lack critical analysis in their reading.

Even those who feel positioned to fight gallantly for the Aboriginal cause after reading, the text may come to believe that the tone of the passage is more ‘impassioned’ than ‘conciliatory’, or indeed ‘provocative’ in the way it positions white Australians to change the ways of the past to ensure a more conciliatory future.

In the State population in 1990, three choices to the question about tone were popular: 4,885 students chose ‘conciliatory’, 3,542 ‘impassioned’ and 3,572 ‘provocative’. In this study of 46 students, 15 believed it was ‘conciliatory’, 12 ‘impassioned’, 15 ‘provocative’ and 4 ‘hostile’. The item writers choice of a conciliatory tone marginalised the other preferred readings of exam candidates who did not select this answer. However, since there is evidence in the passage to support either an ‘impassioned’ or ‘provocative’ reading, the students who did not select the correct answer, were not necessarily poor readers.

The item writers could have been led to take up a conciliatory reading through the use of the first person plural. This is a technique used by writers in order to encourage readers to align themselves with the position of the writer. The word ‘we’ is used six times in the opening paragraph: “You can do something for us and we can do something for you”. It has already been established however, that the modality of the voice of the writer is particularly strong and perhaps some readers were positioned to resist the use of the word ‘we’ as a means of forcing the whites to behave in accordance with the dominant view. The writer also uses the word ‘you’ and ‘your’ four times
each (in one sentence ‘your’ is used three times) and the word ‘our’ twice. The reader could be positioned to see the way these words are used in the opening paragraph as a way of setting up oppositional forces to create a sense of conflict. It could seem to create a sense of moral agency within the reader in the way it contrasts the opposing value systems of Aborigines and white Australians as explained by the writer. Some readers could be positioned to see the words as sermonising about their duty as white Australians to ‘undo’ the wrongs of the past: “Your society has too successfully subjugated us; we are now too weak, numerically, economically and socially to win political battles on our own”. Perhaps too, the list of achievements listed by the writer as Aboriginal achievements could offend those who have been shaped by their own value systems to avoid boasting about success. Readers could indeed find this section of the paragraph to be ‘provocative’, especially after the second sentence which makes the assumption that all white Australians belong to the same class; “You need to understand that our movement is no threat to your property: to your swimming pools or your flash buildings in town”. This sentence creates an “us” and “them” situation as it sets the reader up to accept notions that all white Australians hold the same set of values and that there are no white Australians suffering economically. Students from lower socio-economic areas or perhaps poorer rural settings could feel quite annoyed by the way the language positioned them and could believe the writer was hostile about the situation.

The way the writer uses ‘you’, ‘your’ and ‘our’ also reveals the sense of deficit felt by the Aboriginal people. A passionate voice echoes throughout the first paragraph and invites the reader to recognise the contribution made by the Aboriginal people: “So Aboriginal people are showing and will continue to show other Australians the way to a better, more humanitarian society”. This sense of passion could also annoy some readers because it signals a tendency within white Australian society to behave in an
humanitarian way. People do not generally like to see themselves in this way, so it could position some readers to move away from the idea that the writer was employing a conciliatory tone.

The question about tone invites analysis of only the first paragraph, but it can be seen that this initial positioning will influence choices which will be made in other items. If readers chose ‘impassioned’ or ‘provocative’ rather than ‘hostile’, then the question/answer relationships of the rest of the test, for this particular passage, will not line up with those who chose ‘conciliatory’. The readers who chose ‘conciliatory’ will use the same information, but differently, to make meaning of subsequent question/answer relationships. This does not necessarily mean that in aligning themselves with this one relationship that all other question/answer relationships will result in alignment with the item writers.

In the second paragraph the writer begins to examine what is the ‘true’ history of Australia from an Aboriginal viewpoint. It is suggested there is a lack in the white Australian’s understanding of the ‘truth’. This could lead the reader to expect extrapolation about this point. Before doing so however, an attempt is made to get on-side with young non-Aboriginal Australians by pointing out their intelligence, rationality and logic. Discussion of the content of this intelligence is not extended in any way but is used as a means to set up a contrast to the older white Australian generation who are construed as extremists. Although only three people are named (two of whom are well-known to many Australians and are often ridiculed by the media over matters not necessarily related to Aboriginal affairs) the reader is positioned to make generalisations about all white Australians. By doing this, a situation is set up to make the young Australians feel responsible about what has happened in the past and what contribution they must make for the future. This could further complicate a
reader's understanding because an oppositional force is then created within the white Australian community, that of the generation gap. The young white Australian reader is being encouraged to see the older generation of white Australia as morally inept in relation to the treatment of Aborigines and that the key to a successful future with white and Aboriginal Australians rests with them. This is used as a means to ensure that young Australians take positive action and feel morally culpable for the Aboriginal situation.

The sense of focus for the rest of the passage is to explain the value of Aboriginal history through time, and the way white Australians have very little understanding of the different concepts associated with being Aboriginal. It attempts to remove agency from the Aborigines as regards 'cashing' in on sacred sites by previously espousing the depth of spirituality they have for the land.

Mr Reginald Peacock's Day (See Appendix F)

The information which precedes this passage informs students that the passage is taken from the beginning of a short story and is written by Katherine Mansfield in 1920. This information serves to position readers to construct meaning, not only from their own position, but to take into consideration the historical and the gendered sites of production. Therefore, before any location of meaning can occur, this information must be processed, along with that of the item writers' position which surfaces through the question/answer relationships. The complexity of the task of making meaning is thus magnified; each reader must attempt to negotiate each site of meaning in order to create his/her own preferred reading.

As it is the beginning of a short story, readers would possibly expect to be
introduced to the characters and setting. This exposition is revealed through the third person limited point of view where readers are enlightened about Reginald’s feelings through his surroundings. The preferred reading of the item writers is taken from a feminist position where Reginald’s inadequacies are revealed through the way the writer creates Reginald’s inner voice. The reader is expected to fill in the gaps from what is not said, and as the wife is given no voice, the preferred reading leads readers to make decisions about the accuracy of Reginald’s portrayal of his circumstances.

The interesting point about this passage is the number of students who did not judge Reginald as harshly as the item writers. This invites analysis of how readers could arrive at slightly altered meanings, or even perhaps resistant readings to the feminist position, that was privileged by the item writers. Readers could be positioned to see Reginald constructed as slightly effeminate, artistic and egocentric in the way he is described by the writer: “He rolled over in the big bed...quick dull throbs...thudding blows”. His wife could appear to be dutiful and hard-working: “She came into the room buttoned up in an overall”. She is constructed as a mother figure to both him and their son Adrian. If readers take up the feminist position, they will use this information in the text to support their own position. The writer creates a character who can be viewed as self-centred through the way the language is used to accentuate his grandiose behaviour. The writer repeats words like “really” and “never” to reinforce his excessive obsession with himself, which could position the reader to perhaps question his pleas for recognition as exaggerations. Adjectives and adverbs are used to hyperbolise his nature: “But really, really, to wake a sensitive person like that was positively dangerous!” The writer also uses question marks and exclamation marks throughout to punctuate the artistic voice, which in this case is constructed negatively. Because the wife is given no voice and has little means at her disposal to defend her position, readers could view Reginald’s perspective of the situation as questionable.
The feminist position would encourage alignment with her as a victim of these circumstances, as he is cast as the agent for her drudgery. The text invites the reader to criticise Reginald’s behaviour, if we see that his behaviour as a man should be other than what is depicted in the story. One type of feminist reading could position the reader to attack Reginald for his lack of responsibility and his desire to fantasise about his lack of talent, his lost youth and opportunities with other women. If we take on this reading, we would be totally aligned with the reading given by the item writers.

Because the passage is written in the third person limited, the reader perhaps is invited to share Reginald’s perspective of the relationship. The wife’s position is marginalised because her feelings are not presented; she remains nameless until the last line where she is referred to negatively and is only presented in the dialogue reported by Reginald. If readers are aligned with Reginald’s perspective of the situation they will accept that the wife is an intrusion in his life, and that he is trying to fulfil his duties as best he can because they only accept Reginald’s point of view. Readers could possibly acknowledge that an artistic person could find it difficult to accept routine, and would feel comfortable with the idea that he has not been presented as a stereotypical man. They may expect him to be slightly irresponsible, as many artistic people are often stereotyped this way. This alignment with Reginald would be supported further by the way he indicates that there is a lack of both femininity and sexiness in his wife: “She came to the room buttoned up in an overall, with a handkerchief over her head”; “She had caught him at a weak moment”; “she had done her ~t to clip his wings”. These phrases could indicate to the reader the hopeless trapped situation Reginald finds himself in, and that there is definitely something wrong in the marriage if he needs to fantasise about other women. Readers could identify with situations from their own lives or parents’ lives in arriving at the conclusion that the wife is the agent of Reginald’s spiritual and emotional destruction.
In the 1991 TEE English exam this extract comprised nine questions of which two resulted in students choosing highly probable distractors over keyed answers and there were another three items in which the highly probable distractors rated close to the keyed answers.

The items which resulted in the highly probable distractors outnumbering keyed answers related to Reginald’s construction as a male. The other three items which resulted in the highly probable distractors achieving high preferences by students, related to the way Reginald saw himself, and thus the way the item writers believed he should be seen.

To gain a fuller understanding of the way students constructed meaning, it is necessary to look at the way they may have constructed their view of gender in the text in relation to the specific items which caused them to resist the view held by the item writers.

Question 4 invited them to make a judgement about lines 15-19 in the passage:

“What the hell did she want? Hadn’t he three times as many pupils now as when they were first married, earned three times as much, paid for every stick and stone they possessed, and now had begun to shell out for Adrian’s kindergarten?...and had he reproached her for not having a penny to her name? Never a word - never a sign?”

Readers generally resisted choosing the alternative which condemned Reginald as “resenting paying anything to support his wife and child” and opted to mainly support the response that he was “conscious of the sacrifices he has made for his
family”. Perhaps these readers recognised that it is acceptable to let others know how much you contribute to the upkeep of the family. For many readers, this behaviour of the male head of the family, may have been naturalised to the extent that it is not questioned. Therefore, to choose the option, that he ‘resented paying for his family’, comes across too strongly for their own social value systems. I hasten to add, that the majority of expert readers in the second pilot study, also arrived at the same reading as most of the students.

Question 8 from this passage deals directly with the physical construction of Reginald “soaping his soft, pink body all over with a loofah shaped like a fish” and invites students to decide why it has been used:

(a) **contrasts Reginald’s physical softness with the power of his voice.**
(b) **make Reginald appear less masculine.**
(c) **emphasise Reginald’s health and vigour.**
(d) **make Reginald appear faintly ridiculous.**

The correct answer was “make him appear faintly ridiculous.” Many students explained in their responses that it did not seem a serious enough option. They acknowledged that it did make him appear ridiculous, but believed the best answer was the “contrast between his physical softness and the power of his voice”. Even some of the students, who read the passage as a piece of satire, opted for this distractor over the keyed answer. If we consider that there is more acceptability about the way males can dress and behave in the 1990’s, as well as Reginald’s construction as an artist in the passage, it is possible to understand how readers rejected the keyed answer. An interesting point to note here, is that a number of students indicated that they knew that the answer was not about “making him appear less masculine”; they believed that this
distractor was a trick and knew it was put there as a way of trapping them into a homophobic reading of the passage.

The title of the passage is interesting in the way it shapes readers to different viewpoints. The readers who see it as satire, could view the title “Mr Reginald Peacock’s Day” as pretentious. They may infer that the writer used Reginald’s title “Mr” as a way of articulating his pomposity and gave him the surname “Peacock” to indicate the degree of ‘strut’ he performs in relation to his daily achievements. The title therefore fits into such a satirical reading of the passage. It could also be viewed differently by those who align themselves with Reginald. They may infer that Reginald was given the title to indicate the respect he should hold. The word “Peacock” is very interesting in that in western society we are encouraged to see the peacock as “proud” in a negative way; from an early age we sprout off the saying “as proud as a peacock” and the moral code in relation to this emphasises this type of pride as distasteful. Readers not attuned to such background knowledge will not be able to use the information in this way and may be positioned to see the use of the word “peacock” as perhaps a rather beautiful creature and therefore further align themselves with the character Reginald.

**Ruins Without Value (See Appendix G)**

The information which precedes this extract informs readers that the extract is from a magazine article by television personality Clive James and was published in the United Kingdom in 1983. Readers who know James as a writer who uses satire as a technique in much of his work, would have the necessary scriptual framework from which to operate to read the extract from a particular perspective. Because it is stated that the extract is from a magazine article, readers would expect that journalistic
techniques would be employed by the writer to shape the readers' response. The title itself is very direct in shaping readers to understand that the “ruins” in the extract are without value. Readers may thus assume that the writer will explain why they are without value.

James uses a nostalgic opening to reveal where the Zeppelinfield is located nearly fifty years after World War II. The closure of the opening paragraph reinforces his negative position in regards to the Nazi operations of this era: “except the circle has been squared, and thankfully, flattened.” The second paragraph indicates how to get there from Nuremburg and James contrasts the past with the present: “Nazis used to stand in line yelling”/“the inevitable Japanese tourists taking photographs”. When James moves to the third and fourth paragraphs, he moves into a sense of narrative about the past and includes his unique sense of humour throughout: “Hitler appeared at the podium so they could aim their right armpits at him”. In the fourth paragraph he attempts to vicariously place himself into the position that Hitler once held, and in drawing the comparison, reinforces the critical tone of the passage. The closing paragraph is highly metaphoric: “the dark green trees out of which the brown poison seeped and into which it was driven back” reveals James’ abhorrence for the occurrences which happened during the war.

The problem in negotiating meaning in this passage for some readers was attempting to figure out the balance between the humour and the very serious subject. Most readers would be aware that they are culturally positioned to view the Nazi regime in World War II as horrific. The naturalisation of this view historically, politically and culturally is fairly universal. It is possible James’ use of humour is somewhat lost on many readers because of the cultural positioning of the subject. It is therefore quite interesting to note that item writers do not attempt to construct items around the use of
Two items emerged with the highly probable distractors outnumbering keyed answers in 1992. Both these items were categorised as question/answer relationships which were scriptually implicit. To many readers there appeared to be no textual knowledge in the text to help them establish a more explicit response. Question 30 invited students to make a judgement about Nazism.

Question 30.

"Nazism being essentially a thing of night-time and the forest" and "the dark green trees out of which the brown poison seeped"

(a) was a revival of a pre-civilised form of behaviour.
(b) was strongly associated with nature and the countryside
(c) originated in the less settled parts of Germany.
(d) manifested itself in violence and war-mongering.

Many readers in the study sensed that alternatives (B) and (C) were not accurate and eliminated these possibilities. This left them with alternative (A) which meant they must script into the paragraph what they believed were pre-civilised forms of behaviour. Most readers opted for (D) because they felt that the metaphors used emphasised the violence and war mongering described by James earlier in the passage. Alternative (A) was correct and is an example of an item where a reader would have to be totally aligned with the style of thinking of the item writers to come up with this response. There is no direct evidence in the passage to support the answer; it relies on the scriptual frames in operation in the working memory of the reader to come up with the same frames as the item writers about pre civilised forms of behaviour. Because
most readers felt more comfortable with alternative (D) matching their own meaning and relating more closely to information in the passage they chose it as the best answer.

Question 35 is another item where direct evidence of the alternative is difficult to find for readers. Readers are invited to make judgements about the implied meaning of the last sentence in the extract:

Question 35.

“Nuremberg was Streicher’s personal city...”(lines 45-47) implies that

(a) the silence of the present covers the shouting of the past.
(b) Hitler was unaware of the actions of Streicher’s men.
(c) Nazi behaviour was out of control.
(d) the fanaticism of the rallies had violent consequences.

Readers generally expressed discontent with Question 35. They felt no choices really aligned with their own meaning of the passage in relation to what the question asked. With Question 35 the keyed answer was (D). In the State population of students taking the exam in 1992: 2,809 chose the correct answer; 2,207 chose (A) and 4,975 chose (C). In this study of 48 students: 12 chose the correct answer; 7 chose (A); 8 chose (B) and 21 chose (C). The results of the study align with the State results and indicate that perhaps to most readers the more general answer “Nazi behaviour was out of control” was more acceptable to their understanding of the passage. Because both answers (C) and (D) are very similar, readers were forced to make a choice which matched their own understanding of the text.

Students’ responses and behaviour indicated that this passage was the least
engaging for them. The language used and the content of the passage were removed from their realm of experience, even though they were very much aware of the political values underpinning the passage. The other passages in the study clearly indicated disparate readings by some students, whereas “Ruins Without Value” was interpreted by all in the study in the same general way. Even though it was interpreted similarly, individual responses for this passage revealed the highest proportion of reliance on scriptual implicitness with question/answer relationships.

Section Two

Question - Answer Relationships

The Methodology and Data Analysis chapters revealed that the question/answer relationships are pivotal in manipulating readers. The first section of this chapter also examined how this complex relationship affects the interpretations that readers make of the extracts as well as the way textual and scriptual information are crucial in determining meaning for readers. It was not my intention at the beginning of this study to focus on the question/answer relationships but it became a major focus after numerous readings of the data. It appeared that at this very first step of negotiating the relationship between the question and possible answers, readers used information from the text and/or scriptual frames from their own schemata in order to establish the relationship with the question and set of answers. Readers used varying degrees of textual and scriptual information, and it was not necessarily similar for each item or passage they read; there was evidence of a combination of approaches by some readers to arrive at answers. Because of the shortcomings of TOL data, in not being able to access everything going on in a reader’s head, I could not always be sure if at times readers were using scriptual information before making verbal comments about textual information. It is therefore salient to discuss these relationships to see the possible
patterns which occur to create alternate meanings from the extracts for different readers.

**Question/Answer Approaches**

I firstly coded the relationship between the questions and the possible answers in the way I believed the item writers would have interpreted the passage, in order to arrive at their preferred answers. The categories used were: textually explicit, textually implicit and scriptually implicit, described on page 83 in Chapter 4 on Data Analysis. I was then able to code the relationship between the questions and selected answers of the students. This allowed me to analyse how the students’ answers deemed to be incorrect, could be explained by the use of different textual or scriptual information from that of the test makers. The table below shows the coding of the relationship between the questions and the preferred or ‘correct’ answers of the item writers.

**Table 6.0  Coding of the Question/Answer Relationships**

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<th>Deemed Correct by the Item Writers</th>
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<td><strong>Teaching Whites a Lesson</strong></td>
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In examining the table above it can be seen that nineteen items were categorised as
items dependent on scriptual implicitness (56%); fourteen on textual implicitness (41%) and one on textual explicitness (3%). The majority of items therefore demanded the reader to call on particular scriptual frames in order to make meaning of the text. This is significant because scriptually implicit relationships are more closely linked to socio-cultural shaping of readers and require readers to align closely with the scriptual frames of the item writers in order to select the correct response.

The more I examined the relationship between the questions and possible answers, the more it became evident how readers could have selected a textually implicit answer when a scriptually explicit response was expected by the test makers, or vice versa. The textually explicit category was the least problematic, although there were some readers who categorised the only question falling into this category, as scriptually implicit. Consideration must therefore be given to what a reader believes is textual information to support an answer. Some readers recognised readily some textually implicit information whilst others indicated that information served to trigger scriptual information stored in schemata in order to arrive at meaning.

Pearson and Johnson (1978) suggest that for some readers certain words appear to be more potent and lead students to make scriptual responses. They indicate that in constructing a set of inferences about a text, readers (and I presume this would mean both good and poor readers) use an integrated combination of both textual and scriptual information. So, although as a researcher I aimed to be as accurate as possible in determining how students selected answers to questions, it is most poignant to acknowledge that the complexity of making meaning involves readers interacting amongst the three approaches: textually explicit; textually implicit and scriptually implicit. To exemplify the dynamics of the approaches selected, questions from the passage “Teaching Whites a Lesson” will be discussed in more detail. In
this passage of thirteen items, five were categorised as scriptually implicit in approach; seven textually implicit and one textually explicit.

Scriptually Implicit and Textually Implicit Approaches

The first question of this passage, which was the first question of the test proved to be one in which more students chose a highly probable distractor to the correct answer: twenty five students chose B as their preferred answer whereas seventeen chose the correct answer D. The gender representations were equal in both the B and D choices. The question asks:

In the light of the passage as a whole, the title "Teaching Whites a Lesson" is most likely to mean

(a) that Aboriginal people should be compensated for the damage done to their society by Whites.
(b) that white Australians should listen to the opinions of Aboriginal people.
(c) that Aboriginal people are justified in their anger against White Australian society.
(d) that white Australians would benefit from the examples offered by Aboriginal people.

The question invites the student to summarise the meaning of the passage; to make an overall judgement about its main concerns. I believed the item writers used a textually implicit question/answer relationship. In the first paragraph there are examples of what the aborigines have done over the past twenty years, followed by a discussion in the fifth paragraph about the oral history of aborigines and what it offers white Australians, and in the final paragraph there is an historical discussion about
their value to white Australians. This evidence possibly led the item writers to construct D as the correct answer. Many students however chose B as their answer, offering reasons like:

**Monica: (B Graded student)**

*Probably D but maybe B - choose D - teaching whites a lesson is not meant as an insult to the whites - one is not better than the other but now you come to think of it I'd change it to B - I read it quickly - B sounds better - like whites need to listen now to what the aborigines are saying.*

Monica appeared to have used a scriptual approach in order to arrive at her answer. She chose the correct answer and then changed her mind to B after scriptual frames from long term memory, which were activated by working memory, made her decide: *one is not better than the other*. The information about one side being better than the other is not expressed in the passage but she made the link that whites should not be insulted by the lesson. She was positioned culturally to take on this view and although she seemed quite sure initially that D was correct, she was influenced by her scriptual frames in order to make the judgement that it was time whites listened to the opinions of aboriginal people.

**Sam: (B Graded Student)**

*B is the best answer - it relates to the question better - it is mostly the writer's opinions and he is aboriginal so he is saying the whites should listen to them.*

Sam's response appears to use both scriptual and textual information. He
makes the textual inference required that the writer is aboriginal and makes the judgement that B fits the question best. Because he connects the fact that the writer is aboriginal to the choice that *whites should listen to them*, he is perhaps indicating that whites do not listen. It could be that he has summed up what the writer has said throughout the passage and used textual information to support his answer. It is also possible that his scriptual frames about the state of the relationship between the whites and Aborigines in Australia are in operation.

Most students indicated when discussing B as the preferred answer, that whites need to listen to the opinions of aboriginal people because they were led by the title of the passage, "Teaching Whites a Lesson", to form that particular scriptual frame, which for them summarised a more general meaning of the passage. Some even intimated that the whites need to listen to the aborigines first, in order to be able to benefit from the examples they offer. If reasoning such as this is further analysed, it can be seen that students have obtained a richer meaning from the passage and perhaps have used higher order thinking skills to arrive at such a sophisticated understanding of the passage. They have possibly interpreted the question/answer relationship and text as either textually implicit or scriptually implicit or a combination of both approaches.

When using scriptual information, students tended to draw on their general understanding of race relations in Australia, as well as information from the passage in order negotiate their preferred meaning. When using textually implicit information, they may have believed that the imperative tone of the writer, which appears to address a white Australian audience, is encouraging them to listen to the aboriginal voice in order to understand the different concepts of life between the two cultures.

The second question of the test for this passage required students to look
closely at the first paragraph. The correct response is A. Twenty two students chose the correct response whilst thirteen chose B as their preferred option; eight C and five D.

The first paragraph implies that the major distinction between white society and Aboriginal society is that

(a) white society values material wealth while aboriginal society values social justice.

(b) white society is competitive while Aboriginal society is co-operative.

(c) white society believes in teaching facts, while Aboriginal society is concerned with teaching values.

(d) white society relies in technological expertise while Aboriginal society relies on myth and tradition.

This question directed the students to the first paragraph only; therefore, if the reasoning of the student did not relate to the content of the first paragraph, I assumed close reading comprehension skills had not been employed effectively. The first paragraph opens with a description of the material wealth of white Australians, followed by the way the aboriginal people have set up organisations to help their own people. The item writers possibly adopted a textually implicit relationship with the information provided, because within the passage, examples of the material wealth of the white Australians are given and contrasted with the aborigines' plight for social justice issues.

As with the first question for this passage, students tended to generalise the meaning of the first paragraph and made judgements about the examples given as being
competitive behaviour of the whites in order to obtain their material wealth, and co-
operative behaviour of the aborigines as a way of expressing their concern for each
other in regard to social justice issues. Their responses indicated as with the previous
question both a textually implicit relationship and a scriptually implicit relationship.
Types of responses included:

**Barry (D Graded student):**

B - *because the aboriginal society - they were the first ones to set up these legal
centres, women centres and are co-operating with each other whereas whites compete
and want to get ahead.*

**Felicity (A Graded student):**

B - *because I think it is the answer - none of the others have anything to do with the
first paragraph - it is the one which makes the most sense of that paragraph.*

Barry related to the question/answer/text relationship in a scriptually implicit
way. He pulled from his understanding of aborigines in Australia as well as the
information in the passage to conclude that white Australians are keen ‘to get ahead’
which supports their need to be competitive; he also supports the contrasting image of
the aborigines by suggesting that in setting up these centres their co-operative spirit is
revealed.

The question/answer/text relationship Felicity adopted indicated that her
response was based on textual information. Although she verbalised little, she inferred
she was making reference to the first paragraph only, and made the comment that this
preferred choice fitted best. What she did here and tended to do with other questions (which will be dealt with later when discussing strategies) was to summarise the generalised meaning of the paragraph. She had a very sophisticated understanding of the passage in that she interpreted “to be materialistic” as meaning you needed to be competitive, and then she contrasted this with the aborigines being more co-operative and concerned about their population as a whole. She indicated this contrast in her response to the first item and built on this meaning when responding to the second question. Her comment is an example of a student who not only used information from previous question/answer relationships to build on meaning but also appeared to show a high level of metacognitive understanding, but she was not inclined to elaborate fully when verbalising her understanding. It is also possible she interpreted this question by using scriptual information but her comments did not indicate any elaborative strategy use.

Textually Explicit Approach

The only question/answer relationship students interpreted as textually explicit was in the 1990 paper:

The relationship with the writer and the audience established in this passage is best described as

(a) an Aboriginal activist addressing all young Australians.
(b) a white Australian sympathetic to the aboriginal cause who is addressing other white Australians.
(c) an Aboriginal activist addressing white Australian society in general.
(d) an Aboriginal activist addressing people of his or her own race.
C is the 'correct answer.'

Twenty five students in the population of 48 students chose a textually explicit approach to the question and had a 100% success rate in answering it. Twenty one students believed the information in the question, and possible answers, was textually implicit. Of these twenty one students, seven did not relate the information successfully to the choices and chose the incorrect answer. The information however, appears to be illustrated in the passage. The references to "your" people suggests that the writer is not aligned with the white Australians. If the passage was being addressed only to the young people, the writer's use of imperatives, which are widely used throughout the passage would most likely have been more deliberately focussed on addressing the youthful audience only.

Two students adopted a scriptual approach to the question/answer relationship and were successful in accessing the 'right' scriptual frames in order to arrive at the item writers' preferred meaning. Thus, forty one students chose the correct answer. The seven incorrect responses all chose A as their preferred alternative indicating that they did not believe the information was explicitly cued in the text. They made comments like:

Amanda (B Graded student):

A - Because he or she is trying to put across points to the young Australians because the ones who are taught more of the truth seem to be more rational

Aidan (B Graded student - parents - Chinese migrants)

A - because it seems like someone who knows what he is talking about and he is
addressing young Australians - he is telling the truth about aborigines - that they do not want to take over - they do not want to be thought bad of by white Australians

Both these responses indicate how powerful the writer has been in shaping Amanda’s and Aidan’s response. They have both overlooked textual information which may have assisted them in making better judgements. The question/answer relationship was coded as textually explicit; the clues to the answer were specifically cued by the language in the text. These responses reveal that when a question/answer is clearly determined as textually explicit, the use of scriptual frames stored in the schemata can still interfere with critical comprehension skills as noted by Pearson and Johnson (1978).

**Question/Answer Approaches Used to Get Correct Answers**

For the overall test of 34 questions, the final correctly keyed answers resulted in 47% of answers being correct. This result is very similar to State results for each of the years 1990, 1991 and 1992 (see Appendix K, L and M). It appears to be a pattern, that the State mean for the multiple choice section of the paper (prior to 1995) has resulted in a ‘fail’ for students, whilst the State mean for the written section has a mean which results in the student population passing the section. Table 3: gives a breakdown of these correct results.
Table 6.1 Percentage of Answers Correct

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Students</th>
<th>A Level</th>
<th>B Level</th>
<th>C Level</th>
<th>D Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>47.14</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>13.96</td>
<td>9.97</td>
<td>9.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.1 results indicate that results for A and B graded students are similar, as are the results from the C and D groups. It was, however, predictable that students in the A and B groups would get better results because the test makers manipulate the items until this happens. The results, nevertheless, demonstrate clearly, the problems with summary statistical results across whole groups. Even within the sub-groups across the sample, there were major differences between students. Some of these differences relate back to how they made choices about question/answer relationships, and the methods and strategies they used to attain correct answers. In order to ascertain whether or not a pattern emerged in the relationship between the questions, and the information students used to get the correct responses, it appeared necessary to look at the type of question/answer relationship used by students in achieving the 47% correct answers. These are shown on Table 6.2 below.

Table 6.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question/Answer Approaches Used By Students to Get Correct Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textually Explicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textually Implicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scriptually Implicit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2 indicates that the weaker students relied more heavily on scriptual information to get correct answers. The coding of the relationship between the correct answers and the questions showed that readers needed to use scriptual information.
more frequently than textually implicit information in order to gain correct answers. At first glance, one could infer that the C and D groups were more effective at selecting effective question/answer relationships to give correct answers. However, this does not appear to be the case because C and D students were less successful in answering all the questions (Table 6.1). It seems likely then, that the weaker students used scriptual information more often to get correct answers, but this reliance on scriptual information also means they were more open to adopting a scriptual frame that differed from the item writers, and thus they made more mistakes. However, what we do not know is to what extent social shaping and socio-economic background have placed these students in that particular sub-group. Some of these students may have good comprehension skills but because of their limited access to dominant reading practices are less able to decide which scriptual frames should be chosen.

On the other hand, it appears that the students with the most correct responses used scriptually implied information less frequently and textually implied information more often to get correct responses. This suggests that the better students when using scriptual information, are more likely to select scriptual frames aligned with those of the item writers, and they also make use of more textual references. This may convey the idea that when students were required by the text makers to use textually implicit answers, they were more likely to be successful than when they were expected to use a scriptual frame; however it is more complex than it appears. The analysis of the test makers’ question/answer relationships indicated that more items required scriptually implicit information in order to make meaning. This not only indicates the difficulty in accessing the ‘right’ frames, but also suggests students are more practised at answering textually implied questions. The difficulty is accentuated when students have to make decisions about the scriptual frame the test makers use when a scriptually implied answer is required. Further to this what a student perceived as scriptually
implicit, the test makers may have perceived as textually implicit.

**Question/Answer Approaches By Differently Graded Students**

It was reported in an earlier chapter that there was statistical significance in the success rate of the *textually implicit* category. These results indicate that the more students called on their own scriptual frames to make meaning of the question/answer relationships, the less likely they were to achieve a correct response. That is, there appears to be more room for error when the question/answer relationship requires a scriptual response. Although 56% of the item writers’ preferred meanings were interpreted as requiring scriptual responses, it is the reader’s task to call on the ‘right’ scriptual frames in order to get correct answers in multiple choice tests. This issue of helping students know how to select scriptual frames is problematic. To enable students to project into the ‘content’ of texts by connecting personal experiences with those occurring in a text, teachers often encourage students to use a variety of scriptual frames to answer questions asked in class. To discourage this strategy would undermine the spirit of language syllabi operating in classrooms in Australia. The problem of selecting the ‘right’ scriptual frame is further compounded because textual implicitness resides to some extent with a reader’s familiarity with the content of the subject, and his/her capacity to choose the ‘right’ scriptual frames in order to make judgements about what is being implied in the text. To make judgement about what appears to be a cognitive skill, that is, to textually imply, it is also necessary to consider to what degree scriptual framing enables a reader to draw a particular inference about a text. If the ‘right’ scriptual frames are not called on, students may make incorrect inferences, but this may only be an outcome of their framing of the question and not an indicator of poor comprehension.
Textually Implicit Differences

The Male A group used the textually implicit approach the most and achieved the greatest success rate. The rate of usage and success rate of the textually implicit approach in the Female A group, Male B and Female B groups’ results were fairly similar. The C and D groups used the approach less and achieved fewer correct results. There were within these two groups, differences worth mentioning, as the D group used the approach least but had more success than the students identified in the C group. This tied in with a couple of teachers’ comments who identified the students into the grades. They mentioned that there were D students who were placed in the category because they hadn’t completed assignments rather than being placed in the grade because of what they considered was a lack of ability. It may be a lack of reading ability which resulted in weaker students being placed in lower grades but perhaps the degree to which students were affected by lack of motivation or their understandings of classroom discursive practices needs to be considered. The results are therefore flawed to some extent because they can not account for all the variables which affect the reading behaviour of students.

Scriptually Implicit Differences by Differently Graded Students

The scriptually implicit approach reflected the findings of the textually implicit approach. With this approach, the Male A group used it the least but when they did, it resulted in more correct answers in relation to the other groups. The Female A, Male B and Female B groups’ user rates and success rates were similar as were the C and D groups. The latter two groups had the least success which further supports the notion that the ability to scriptually imply in such a way as to align with the scripts used by the test makers, results in more correct answers. It appears one of the difficulties for the C
and D groups is to find the same script as the test makers - but it must be kept in mind that the test makers have manipulated the test to do this.

These statistics also support Quin’s discussion of the construction of a multiple choice paper (1995). He explains that the predetermined distribution is put in place by the manipulation and selection of items until they fit the results of the top group of students. This was also evident in this study because although female students achieved slightly better results across all graded groups, it was the Male A group in the study which clearly indicated the greatest success in the test. What this means in terms of achieving a good result in multiple choice comprehension tests, is the capacity of a student, in other graded groups, to adopt the scriptual frames of the top graded group. It is, of course, not realistic to believe that all students would be able to do this and is dependent on the degree to which they lack cognitive skills, as well as the degree to which they are able to access the necessary social practices, in order to align themselves with the scriptual frames used by the ‘successful’ readers.

The dynamics of selecting the correct responses in multiple choice reading tests not only rests on the textually explicit, textually implicit and scriptually implicit approaches readers take to the question/answer relationships, but also on the methods used for making choices and the metacognitive strategies within the selected approach to question/answer relationships. In the next section an analysis of methods used to make choices and metacognitive strategies employed by students in this study revealed a highly interactive relationship operating in order to make sense of the multiple text structures present in the test.
Section Three

Graded Students’ Use of Methods and Strategies

Most students used a variety of methods of choice and metacognitive strategies in order to answer questions regardless of the grade in which they were identified. The major differences appeared to be in the way that methods of choice and metacognitive strategies were combined together with approaches to the question/answer relationships. The TOL data could only be analysed from what the students verbalised at interview, so it was important to consider how the confidence in expressing ideas, of students in particular grades, may have influenced what they were prepared to say.

Another consideration in analysis of data was the placement of students by their teachers into the identified grades. The grading system in all schools depends on the attainment of numerical marks in order to be placed in an appropriate grade. Some students may be highly motivated and work to potential, whilst others can lack the motivation to achieve potential due to a variety of factors. Factors which affect motivation to achieve can often place students in grades below their potential level. The reasons for students not achieving potential were not investigated as a part of this study. However, it is also worth bearing in mind that some students placed in the lower graded groups may be there because they do not have access to some of the dominant values of the culture.

Two of the teachers who identified the students into the grades in this study pointed out that a few students who did not qualify for TEE English as a Second Language had been selected for the study. They indicated that these students were very enthusiastic and hard-working but still experienced difficulties with vocabulary and the cultural meanings available to them when deconstructing texts. Therefore, when making
comment about the data, I worked from a perspective which would enable me to draw some conclusions about the differences between graded students, but would also guide me into acknowledging the limitations of the study.

**The Use and Success Rate of Methods and Strategies**

The percentage use of methods of choice and metacognitive strategies used by the students, and the success rate, that is, using the methods of choice and metacognitive strategies in order to achieve correct answers, are indicated in Tables: 6.3, 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6. The differential indicators are also tabled and measure the sum or difference between the use of methods of choice and metacognitive strategies and their success rates in the test. However, it must be remembered that attaining correct answers involved students using a number of methods and/or strategies in conjunction with each other, and these tables indicate only the percentage use and success rate of individual methods and strategies. Because of the complexity of the reading process, it was difficult to record confidently whether one of the methods or strategies led students to a correct response, or whether it was a combination of them. It was also evident that some categories resulted in a correct answer with one item, yet gave an incorrect answer for another item. Nevertheless, the tables which identified the success rate of individual methods and strategies, allowed comparisons to be made between the way the differently graded students used these methods and strategies.

Tables: 6.3, 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6 indicate the use and success rate of the individually graded students, and also reveal differences in the way the male and female students in the study used methods of choice and metacognitive strategies to attain correct answers.
### Table 6.3 Percentage Use of Categories and Percentage Success Rate by A Graded Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORIES</th>
<th>Male A</th>
<th>Diff</th>
<th>Female A</th>
<th>Diff</th>
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<td>63</td>
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<td>50</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>43</td>
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<td>Scriptually Implicit</td>
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<td>50</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>METHOD OF CHOICE</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>66</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>67</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elimination and Contemplation</td>
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<td>50</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>73</td>
<td>43</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
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<td>45</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inferred Influences</td>
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<td>37</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elaboration</td>
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<td>48</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generalised the Meaning</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasoned Through Distractors</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
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<td>Vocabulary</td>
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### Table 6.4 Percentage Use of Categories and Percentage Success Rate by B Graded Students

<table>
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<tr>
<th>CATEGORIES</th>
<th>Male B</th>
<th>Diff</th>
<th>Female B</th>
<th>Diff</th>
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<td>68</td>
</tr>
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<td>Textually Implicit</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scriptually Implicit</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>METHOD OF CHOICE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elimination</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemplation</td>
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<td>50</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
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<td>Elimination and Contemplation</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>37</td>
</tr>
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<td>Calculated Choice</td>
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<td>47</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Random Answer Choice</td>
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<td>7.6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
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<td><strong>METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>43</td>
<td>56</td>
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<td>Referred to Text</td>
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<td>60</td>
<td>55</td>
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<td>Inferred Influences</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elaboration</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalised the Meaning</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
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<td>Reasoned Through Distractors</td>
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<td>80</td>
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<td>Vocabulary</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>31</td>
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</table>

133
Table 6.5 Percentage Use of Categories and Percentage Success Rate by C Graded Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORIES</th>
<th>Male C % Use</th>
<th>Success Rate</th>
<th>Diff</th>
<th>Female C % Use</th>
<th>Success Rate</th>
<th>Diff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>APPROACHES</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>+25</td>
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<td>70</td>
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<td>-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scriptually Implicit</td>
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<td>+17</td>
<td>105</td>
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<td>+17</td>
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<tr>
<td>METHODS OF CHOICE</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Elimination</td>
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<td>47</td>
<td>+11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>+33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contemplation</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>+17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>+24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elimination and Contemplation</td>
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<td>+2</td>
<td>26</td>
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<td>+24</td>
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<td>-23</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td>METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>+9</td>
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<td>Through Distractors</td>
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<td>+11</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>+22</td>
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</table>

Table 6.6 Percentage Use of Categories and Percentage Success Rate by D Graded Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORIES</th>
<th>Male D % Use</th>
<th>Success Rate</th>
<th>Diff</th>
<th>Female D % Use</th>
<th>Success Rate</th>
<th>Diff</th>
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Tables 6.3, 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6 will be used as a reference point for discussing how students used the established categories of methods of choice and metacognitive strategies in order to demonstrate any differences which were found to be operating across the differently graded groups.

To illustrate how students were identified into categories, the passage *Mr Reginald Peacock's Day* and students' responses to the question/answer relationships for this passage will be used. Each category will be defined, examples of students' responses will be analysed and conclusions drawn about student performance in each category.

**Methods of Choice**

Students were placed into categories on the basis of whether they eliminated, contemplated, eliminated and contemplated, used a calculated choice or selected randomly. A sub category of methods of choice, identified those students who either chose a correct answer or a highly probable distractor. The categories *Elimination, Contemplation, Elimination and Contemplation, Calculated Choice* and *Random* will all be dealt with using the same question so the method used for the same question can be compared.

*Elimination, Contemplation, Elimination and Contemplation, Calculated Choice* and *Random*

Question 3. from *Mr Reginald Peacock's Day* will be used to demonstrate how students used the above categories and the way in which different groups of students used these methods of choice.
Q.3 The passage suggests that Reginald views his wife's housekeeping activities as

(a) strategies for drawing attention to herself in an attempt to gain sympathy.
(b) an inconvenience, but necessary to the pursuit of his career.
(c) an irritation he must endure.
(d) malicious attempts to provoke and humiliate him.

The correct answer is D.

Below are some examples of students method of choice:

Elimination:

Glen (C graded student):

A...not it, B not it, D not it...go for C. It talks about it being an irritation but he doesn't do anything about it so he must endure it.

Contemplation:

Amanda (B graded student):

She does provoke him and she does draw attention to herself and it could be B too and she is an irritation to him...I'd put C but she doesn't so much humiliate him but aggravates him and irritates him.

Elimination/Contemplation:

Deanne (C graded student):

It is A or D. She provokes him but it is A because it doesn't say anything about her
humiliating him but it does say “she has been up since dawn” so she is trying to get sympathy from him.

Calculated Choice:

Marcus (A graded student):

Most of the things his wife does like “wake him” etc. are attempts to provoke him and humiliate him as well...well that is how he sees it all.

Random:

Victor (C graded student):

It is a guess...A...because I really do not know.

Students used the information to support the way they believed they were being positioned by the text, and although some of them went about it differently, they often ended up choosing the same answer. Take for example Glen and Amanda: they both chose C for the answer but Glen clearly eliminated all the possibilities whilst Amanda tried to see how each alternative worked before making up her mind.

Deanne internally eliminated B and C before making judgements about A and D. She used the information directly from the text, as did Marcus, but called on a different phrase to support her negotiated meaning. This led her to be drawn to the A alternative, whereas Marcus applied different information from the text to draw him to the ‘correct’ alternative. Marcus’ methods and strategies used for selecting answers had all been internalised before he verbalised his reason for the choice he made; however, I strongly suspect he used the elimination method as he was very quick to respond to each item.
Some students used the same information to arrive at different answers. Take for instance Aidan and Brent:

Aidan:

*I think it is in the first paragraph...it talks about how he hated the way his wife woke him up and drew attention to herself by what she was wearing and how she was working. Then it says he did not want to know her...that it was annoying him so he had to endure it. The answer is C.*

Brent:

*Because at the start of the passage she would come in and be dressed for work to make it look like she had been working a long time...this is only what Reginald thought, so it must be A.*

Both students used a *calculated choice* method as they only indicated the reasons for their answers and did not disclose whether they *eliminated, contemplated* or used a *combined* method. Although their responses were different from each other and were incorrect, they used the same information from the passage to choose alternatives. The idea about the wife coming into the bedroom in the morning to accentuate how hard she had been working seemed to impact on both these readers. Aidan however, moved on to link it with how it annoyed Reginald, which is what attracted him to alternative C. Brent left his meaning with the way the wife looked and worked. Brent's response demonstrated his ability to distance himself from Reginald when he stated that "it is only what Reginald thought." This brought him closer to seeing the irony in the passage whereas Aidan became fully immersed in the way the characters related to each other.
Differences Between Graded Groups Using Different Methods of Choice

Elimination

The Male A group clearly used the elimination method of choice more than any other group (Table 6.3) and this resulted in a fairly high rate of success. The Female A students however, used it a third as frequently as the Male A group. This could perhaps suggest that if female students in the top group of this study had chosen to eliminate more often, they could have perhaps achieved better results. The Male B group had slightly less success than the A group in using elimination, and the contrast between the male and female students in the B group revealed very few female students selected this method of choice as a means of answering the questions. Although they used it less, they achieved the same positive differential as the Male B group. The C Male group achieved the lowest positive differential with this method of choice, although they used it frequently.

Contemplation

This was usually selected as a method of choice by female students and will therefore be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Elimination and Contemplation

The data revealed this was a method mainly used by the A group of students as a whole. The only other group to use this method with relative success was the Female C group. The Male A group used it the least amount of times but had the greatest amount of success, whereas Female A students used it nearly twice as much as the Male
A group and achieved relatively the same success rates.

**Calculated Choice**

Results revealed there were no significant differences in the methods to choose an answer except in the way the female students used the *calculated choice* method. This category revealed statistical significance at 3 degrees of freedom at 0.05 probability favouring the way females used this method in the overall population.

The 'significance' of this statistical result is somewhat questionable because of the nature of the category itself. Students were placed into this category if they appeared to calculate the answer internally, without directly verbalising the methods and strategies they were using in order to make meaning. It is therefore possible that the internalisation of one of the *elimination, contemplation or combined* methods, could in fact have been in operation. Because of the limitations of the TOL data to procure information without directly leading the student if information from them was not readily forthcoming, it was necessary to create a category which identified students who did not verbalise their method of processing information, but appeared to carefully construct their reasoning about their choice for an answer. Therefore, although there was statistical significance, it provided no meaningful conclusions which could be drawn from the data. There were perhaps reasons related to differences in gender which led females to adopt this approach in the first place and this will be discussed in the next section.

**Random**

Too few students used the random approach for it to appear as a percentage use or rate of success so this will not be discussed.
Answer Choices

The Answer Choice category links to the method the student used to choose a particular alternative in the possible answers. The students were categorised into two categories in this section: Answers Correct and Distractor Choice.

Answers Correct

For students to be identified into this category they had to choose the answer deemed correct by the item writers. Table 6.1 indicates the graded groups overall success rate of students for this category, whereas Tables 6.3, 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6 show the differences between the male and female sub-groups.

Distractor Choice

For students to be identified into this category they had to choose highly probable alternatives to the answers deemed correct by item writers. These highly probable alternatives were the choices which were closest to the correct answers (see Appendices K, L and M).

Some items in the passage Mr Reginald Peacock’s Day revealed students clearly opted for highly probable alternatives. In the analysis of this passage (discussed earlier in the chapter) it was pointed out that Q.4 and Q.8 resulted in students in the State in 1991 choosing distractors over keyed answers for both questions. In this study Q.4 also emerged as an item in which 58% of students were not inclined to choose the correct answer. This question/answer relationship has been dealt with to some extent in the analysis of the passage in an earlier section of this chapter but few student responses
were discussed.

Q.4. The passage implies that Reginald sees himself as

(a) an unworldly man who cannot cope with the practical details of life.
(b) a sensitive man whose wife is totally unsympathetic to his needs
(c) a great artist constrained by a mundane and sordid marriage.
(d) a noble man who has made great sacrifices for his wife and family

Below are some of the responses given by students which explained why they chose the distractors:

**Rena (B graded student):**

_I did this again through a process of elimination. It doesn’t imply he has ambitions to be wealthy - its mainly talking about the sacrifices he has made and how his wife takes it all for granted. I don’t think he really resents having to support his wife and child - well actually I do! He does resent having to pay - earning the money and having to pay out for the kid’s Kindy - every stick and stone...I’ll keep it as C though because it still refers to the sacrifices he has had to make._

**Emily (C graded student):**

_He talks about how he hasn’t had much to begin with. Like he started with one pupil, now he has three...he is giving her three times as much money and she knows how much he is giving but she doesn’t show him any recognition for his effort._
Mabib (A graded student):

Well C and D are almost right... he is conscious of his sacrifices and his wife doesn’t understand him. With D he is proud of his progress ..he has pupils and he hasn’t got anything from his wife but he doesn’t blame her for it. He is proud of his station in life.

Brett (D graded student):

I don’t think that sentence has anything to do with his ambitions and he wasn’t resenting it or he wasn’t proud of material things. He was very aware of his sacrifices and maybe he was looking for concern.

Because all these students chose the alternative relating to Reginald being “conscious of his sacrifices”, all responses centred around making this meaning work for them. Rena, Emily and Mabib read in alignment with the character Reginald. Brett’s response was not as clear; it appeared he internalised the meaning before verbalisation of his response and then eliminated the other possibilities.

The alignment with the character Reginald was fairly analogous with the other three students. They all believed the wife to be responsible for Reginald’s unhappiness, however Emily and Rena structured their responses countenancing both the husband and the wife’s position in making meaning. Mabib’s response positioned him with Reginald. It is interesting to note his comment when discussing the possibility that the answer was about him being “proud of his progress”. Mabib used his own words “station in life” to match the meaning of the alternative, and although he decided against it in the end, he used a scriptual approach to this question in the way he connected his own language to that of the alternatives presented. Mabib was born in Iran and had been
in Australia five years at the time of the interview. His Iranian culture and B’hai faith (he indicated this at interview) would undoubtedly position him to hold Reginald in high regard in the family. It would be difficult for him to read this in another way because of the strong value system, operating in his family and culture, about gender roles in society.

Having trialled this passage on adult readers in the pilot study, it was found to be not just a reflection of youthful perspectives about life; many of the adult readers who read this passage arrived at the same understanding as most of the students, feeling the word ‘resent’ too strong to describe Reginald’s attitude. Students failing this passage badly were representative of rural, Vietnamese, Macedonian, Chinese and Greek backgrounds. These students scored 2 or less out of 9 in this section of the test.

Contemplated the Key

Many students contemplated the possibility of the correct answer matching their preferred meaning in items, but ultimately decided against it. Although contemplating the key was not identified as a category, students’ responses to question/answer relationships often revealed close alignment to the preferred response. The item in which this occurred the most times was Q.9 of the passage. This question/answer relationship was undoubtedly scriptual because there were so many ways of interpreting the alternatives. With this question many students moved through the alternatives trying to make them fit their preferred meaning of the passage. The question asked:

The passage implies that the main features of Reginald’s character are

(a) vanity and self-centredness
(b) pride and self-satisfaction
(c) smugness and superiority
(d) snobbishness and resentment

The correct answer is A. The words used in these alternatives are emotionally loaded and find their meaning from the perspective the reader places on the individual words in relation to how they see Reginald. The scriptual frames called upon to unpack the emotional meaning behind the words is the key to unlocking meaning for the reader with this item.

Georgia (C graded student):

Not particularly sure but D - I look at snobbishness as an emphasis on money and he has resentment towards his wife but someone else could think it was something else. He is smug because of what he has done and he does think he is superior to his wife. He is also proud and self-satisfied... and also vain and very self centred. I think I’ll change it to C but it could really be any of them

Stewart (A graded student):

He is pretty smug...the way he thinks he is so good and better than anybody else. He is vain and self-centred... it could be any of the others but it talks about how he likes himself the most.

Both students suggested the difficulty they had in choosing the alternative and acknowledged that the answer could be any of them. The correct answer, although mentioned by both students, appeared to have no real appeal with both students
choosing alternative C over the others.

**Metacognitive Strategies**

Students were placed into the categories on the basis of the metacognitive strategies they used to help them select answers. These were: *checked the text, elaboration, referred to the text, inferred influences, generalised the meaning, reasoned through the distractors.*

**Checked the Text**

To be placed in this category, students were observed going back to check information in the text in order to select an alternative. Some questions resulted in students checking the text more than other questions, which indicated that some question/answer relationships triggered particular metacognitive behaviour in readers in order for them to make meaning. The item from the passage *Mr Reginald Peacock’s Day* which triggered students to check the text the most times was Q.5. The question invited students to go back to line 20 to check the meaning of the word “insatiable” in relation to the passage, which to most students meant the rest of the passage, and not the immediate words surrounding the word “insatiable” in the question. The wording of this question led readers to check the text, whereas a question which asked for a more general meaning led fewer students to check the text. Q. 1 for this passage demanded more of a general overview of the character’s behaviour, therefore readers, having just read the passage, and made an overall judgement, were less inclined to check for finer details. Whether or not checking for these finer details in a question which is more inclined to generalities, would lead to more “correct” answers, could not be answered confidently in this study.
Differences Between Groups with Checking the Text

The results of all students in this category revealed statistical significance at 1 degree of freedom at 0.05 probability favouring the way females checked the text in order to get the answers right.

No consistent patterns emerged between the graded groups in the data for this strategy. However, there were differences between the groups: the Male A and Female B graded students achieved the same success rate but the Male A group user rate was 10% less. This could suggest that if the Male A group checked the text on more occasions, they may have gained better results. The Female A group checked the text the most out of all the groups but achieved less success than the Male A group. The Male D group had very little success with this strategy which could suggest a gendered way of behaving. Their results contributed to pulling the male success percentage rate down, which increased the likelihood of this strategy resulting in a statistical significance favouring females. The way females checked the text will also be dealt with in the next section when discussing different gendered reading patterns.

Students checked the text less than they believed they did. A post interview was conducted which invited students to explain how they went about working out the correct answers. Nearly all students emphasised the way they checked the text for the items. The results of course revealed that for the whole population of students, the text was checked about 34% of the time. It would however be remiss of me to suggest that only 34% of students checked the text in the test. Most students checked the text some of the time in order to make sense of the question/answer relationships

A positive point about this strategy is that it is one all teachers can encourage
students to do in preparation for the test. It is conceivable though, that a student could adopt a resistant reading to that of the item writers, and check the text to verify meaning a number of times and still choose the wrong answer, because their meanings do not align with those of the item writers. Although the strategy is a valuable way of checking meaning it needs to be used in conjunction with other strategies that may help the reader align their reading with that of the item writers. If the scriptual frames however, are different, then it appears probable that no strategies, individual or those used in conjunction with each other, will assist the reader in making meaning.

Referred to the Text

To be placed into this category, students had to either make general reference to the ‘goings on’ in the text or make direct textual reference in order to explain answers.

Less than half the students in this study used this strategy to obtain correct answers. The item in which most students used the strategy to negotiate the meaning in Mr Reginald Peacock’s Day was Q. 3 but because this has been dealt with through the use of another strategy, Q.6 will be used to highlight the way students made reference to the text of the passage. The question asked:

Reginald’s image of himself as “half child, half wild untamed bird” (lines 25-26) implies that he

(a) wishes that he could be freed from his family obligations.
(b) believes someone else should take responsibility for him.
(c) sees himself as vulnerable and helpless.
(d) sees himself as a free, innocent creature trapped into domesticity.
The correct answer is D.

This category, in some way, is similar in directing students to adopt metacognitive skills as is the checking the text category. Because the question directed students to particular lines in the text, they were led back to the text to re-read these lines. Not all students of course, adopted the strategy to do this but it is important to acknowledge that the wording of a question itself may direct readers to adopt certain reading behaviours.

Examples of students making reference to the text in order to answer the question:

**Diane (B graded student):**

*C...The words “totally incompetent to cope with bills and creditors and all the sordid details of existence”...makes him see himself as helpless and vulnerable ...you know to the people like the creditors.***

**Melissa (D graded student):**

*I’m not sure but it does say in the passage he was “half child and half wild”...he couldn’t pay his bills and she was the one who trapped him so it must be D.***

**Rhys (A graded student):**

*D...because what he says “half child, half wild, unable to pay bills”...all the creditors that he has to deal with...it says it in A and C...a bit vulnerable ...he is a bit wild and all these bills that he has to deal with. It is D because “half child”... like a child...a bird...he wants to be free and feels trapped because he can’t express his feelings.***
Sean (D graded student):

He wishes he could be free... by saying “half child, half wild and unable to pay the bills”... all these things you have to do in a family. He just wishes he didn’t have to do it so I choose A.

All the responses led back to the particular lines in the text, with two students choosing the correct alternative, and the other two choosing two different alternatives. With such direct reference back to particular lines, should we expect students to see that D was the correct alternative? Like the other categories already examined, it appeared that students needed to match the alternatives with their own understanding of the passage. The degree of alignment with Reginald in this passage is therefore crucial to the way passages in the text are interpreted.

Readers could approach this question/answer relationship with the belief that they are making effective textual implications in relation to the question asked, by directing themselves to the words of the text to support their meaning. It unfortunately was not that simple for many of the students across the graded groups. At the very point readers believed that they were making the correct textual implications, their scriptual frames led them to internalise what the direct reference to the text meant to them and their own social shaping as an individual, and they chose the incorrect alternative, totally convinced it was right because it matched their understanding of the passage.

Sean’s response indicated his reasoning was sound about Reginald being “half child, half wild”; he even made reference to his wish for freedom because he didn’t want the responsibility of a family. His response revealed he comprehended effectively as he recognised Reginald’s sense of entrapment as it what is indicated in the correct
alternative, but he chose alternative A which if looked at closely, is a mirror image of the correct alternative. If Reginald is indeed trapped into domestic life, a reader could easily come to the conclusion that he would wish to be free of it. Sean was most confident in his reply and was comfortable with his reasoning to get the correct answer. His direct and general textual referencing enabled him to reinforce his rich understanding of this question.

Diane’s incorrect choice C resulted from her making direct reference to the text with “half child, half wild untamed bird” and going on further to see how these words connected to the rest of the sentence. She felt she could not take the words in isolation and connected them to the rest of the sentence which related to his inability to pay bills and cope with his sordid existence. This could be a learned reading behaviour pattern as teachers often encourage students to read phrases in relation to the context around them; it would seem very unusual for some students to do it any other way. Because Diane used this connecting strategy to surrounding words, the phrase in the question took on a slightly different meaning for her as she saw Reginald as vulnerable and helpless.

All students made some reference to Reginald’s inability to cope with creditors and bills, and the male responses emphasised his desire to be freed from these duties. The social incultration of male duty in the family must surely frame some of these scriptual patterns in operation with this text, and although Melissa did not go as far as emphasising his desire for freedom, she too directed the responsibility of his drudgery at his wife.

**Inferred Influences**

This category connected to the previous category of referring to the text but
involved students making two types of inferences about their understanding between the questions and possible answers. Students either directly inferred from within the text, explaining that some word or phrase led them to choose a particular alternative, or else they made indirect reference which related to life experience outside the text. This experience connected scriptually to the language used in the text and led them to make judgements about the alternatives available. Sometimes students combined the direct and indirectly inferred influences in order to make meaning of the question/answer relationships.

**Directly Inferred Influences**

Students discussing their reasons for choosing their preferred answer to Q.9.

**Rachel (A graded student):**

*He with the resentment “had he ever reproached her...” in his mind he was thinking it but he never said it to her. He does think he is superior but he isn’t smug. It could be A but because it has strong resentment in the first paragraph this is what makes me choose D. I guess am choosing this answer because it focusses on this one word “resentment”*

**Mabib (A graded student):**

*A and B...I think he is vain, self-centred, proud and self-satisfied. Which one is the most dominant? Do I have to choose only one answer? I'll choose B because he really shows he is proud through his self-centredness. He has a sense of satisfaction with his superiority over her and the way he pays the bills makes me think it must be B.*
Indirectly Inferred Influences

Students responding to Q.8

Danny (C graded student):

The answer is D because a man having a pink body is ridiculous. The writer is not making him look less masculine because that is not what the passage is about so I wouldn’t choose B. I wouldn’t have chosen A because I don’t think they are talking about his powerful voice either and it hasn’t anything to do with his health and vigour so I think that if I saw a man looking like him I would think he was ridiculous.

Madeline (B graded student):

It is D because if they were going to contrast his physical softness with his voice they wouldn’t have the loofah shaped like a fish. You would laugh at people you saw like this and I don’t think any of the other alternatives even came into it. He just looked ridiculous to me.

The directly inferred influences linked more to a textually implicit approach to the question, as they focussed on words within the text which directed the students to meaning. Rachel’s response centred on the ‘resentment’ which is in the first couple of paragraphs of the text and she maintained that this was most important. She did not contemplate the possibilities with the other word “snobbishness”, because for her, the overriding tone of the passage was about his resentment in the relationship. This is what led her to make an incorrect choice.
Mabib’s response is directed at the pride and self-satisfaction of the character, and although he felt uncomfortable being only able to make one choice, he focussed on Reginald’s emphasis regarding paying the bills. He therefore inferred what influenced him to make a certain choice. His reasoning appeared sound about both words in the alternative but he failed to choose the correct answer.

Danny and Madeline’s response to Q.8 for this passage were examples of indirectly inferred influences and both linked closely to a scriptually implicit approach to the question. They both chose the correct answer and their scriptual framing in their responses targeted the way in which Reginald looked ridiculous. Danny stressed the construction of the male gender in that he contrasted Reginald’s construction with what he believed a man should look like “because a man having a pink body is ridiculous”. He was however quick to point out that the passage was not about masculinity. The scriptual frames he used, led him to believe that a man “soaping his soft, pink body all over with a loofah shaped like a fish” would look quite ridiculous.

Madeline just didn’t believe she could take seriously anyone who looked like this and levelled it to her own experience when she said “you would laugh at people you saw like this.” These two students have in the context of the test, utilised this metacognitive strategy within the scriptually implicit approach, in order to make meaning for themselves. They also managed to align their readings with the preferred reading of the item writers for this particular question.

**Differences Between the Groups with Referred to the Text**

The pattern which emerged with this data grouped the A and B groups collectively and C and D groups collectively. The success rate of the A and B groups
indicated a positive differential of 5 favouring the Male A group. The Male A group used it effectively because they also had the most effective scriptual frames in order to make the strategy work for them. The C and D groups appeared to use it with less success. The Male D group appeared to use the strategy more than the other groups in the bottom half, but was the only group which emerged with a negative differential. The way the Male D group referred to the text was always in a very general way and most often linked in with their scriptually implicit approach to questions. Their scriptual framing of ideas which they believed related to questions, and surfaced in their points of reference, did not match those of the item writers. The extent to which this lack of success could be identified as a ‘cognitive lack’ or perhaps lack of social access, is too difficult to determine with the information available in this study.

Elaboration

This was a strategy all students used in making meaning. It is a learned reading behaviour from a very early age as teachers and parents encourage children to enter the world of the text and explain their interpretations. Students identified as using this category entered the setting of the text and magnified the world of the characters or subject being explored. All questions for Mr Reginald Peacock’s Day used relatively the same amount of elaboration, therefore Q.7. will be used for analysis of responses as it has not yet been discussed in other categories. To use elaboration as a strategy students adopted a scriptually implicit approach to the question/answer relationship.

The question asks:

The lines “the tooth glass on the bottom of the shelf trembled and even the bath tap seemed to gush stormy applause” (lines 39-41)
(a) emphasise Reginald's awareness of the banality of his surroundings.

(b) evoke the emotive power of Reginald's voice.

(c) show how Reginald's egotism transforms even inanimate objects into an appreciative audience.

(d) foreshadow the success of Reginald's performance later in the story.

The 'correct' answer is C.

Pauline (A graded student):

C because I think because Reginald is an artist and lives in a fantasy world and he has such a dull life he creates an audience for himself out of anything, even inanimate objects.

Georgia (C graded student):

C because well I'm not sure but in lines (39-41) because he doesn't get appreciative applause from his wife and child he has to turn inanimate objects into an audience. D is a stupid answer...you don't know the rest of the story...it could lead to Martians coming down or anything...at least with this one you know that it cuts down on one answer to choose from.

Paul (C graded student):

C because I think he is sort of dreaming. He is singing and everyone is applauding because he is really at the opera and everyone is going crazy over him. This is how he sees it in his head.
Luke (D graded student):

*When he uses the words “wedded” he gets angry and really frustrated...this shows the great power in his voice so it is B.*

Dwayne (C graded student):

*Wow! He must have a strong voice to make a tooth glass tremble like that. It must be B because of the way the tooth glass trembles.*

These examples revealed different levels of understanding of the passage. The first three responses indicated the correct answer in their responses but it is interesting to see the way elaboration led them to their choices.

Pauline’s alignment with Reginald took her into his dreary world where she observed Reginald’s need to create his own audience as a way to partly satisfy his desires. This elaboration guided her to make the meaning fit her perceived scriptual frame. In Pauline’s elaboration there was no mention of the wife and child whereas Georgia’s elaboration cast criticism at the wife and child for not applauding Reginald’s talents. Her reasoning, although different from Pauline’s, still resulted in a correct answer. She also elaborated about why it was not another alternative which focussed on the lines in the question foreshadowing future parts of the story. Her outburst: “it could lead to Martians” provided insight into how some students go about eliminating other alternatives. She even announced that it couldn’t possibly be the alternative because how could a reader possibly know what Reginald was going to do. There are two ways of looking at the strategies Georgia employed: either she felt there was not
enough information in the extract to lead her to an understanding of what could happen, or her metacognitive skills were poor because of her lack of acknowledgement that foreshadowing future events in stories is a frequent occurrence.

Paul’s response linked closely with Pauline’s in that he also allowed Reginald to enter a fantasy world. He however took it further than Pauline in that he projected Reginald out of his dreary setting and into the world and glamour of operatic society. Like Pauline and Georgia he chose the ‘correct’ answer.

Both Luke and Dwayne chose alternative B to this question and concentrated on discussing the power of Reginald’s voice. Luke projected the lines given in the question back to the rest of the words in lines 39-41. In doing this he shifted his meaning away from the finer details of the sentence and calculated a more generalised meaning of the lines in question which indeed focussed on the strength of Reginald’s voice. Such a strategy is taught in developing reading skills; meaning is rarely negotiated in isolation - readers in classrooms from K-12 are all encouraged to look at the words around a phrase in order to make meaning. What a reader has to do in a case like this, is make a judgement in relation to how the item writers possibly read the question/answer relationship.

Dwayne captured the same meaning as Luke although he didn’t express it in the same way; his was a sense of wonderment that a voice could make a glass tremble. Luke suggested that it was Reginald’s anger and frustration that was the cause of his voice being powerful enough to move the tooth glass. This anger and frustration was due to his confinement in the marriage, which Luke mentioned in earlier responses to questions. These two students have taken serious readings of the question/answer relationship whereas there were slight glimmers with the other responses that the
students picked up on the humour of the two lines. Although it was not evident in the written language, the tone of their voices at interview indicated they believed that the writer was possibly using humour. It appears that many sixteen year old readers do not have the life experience available to them to understand some of the subtle nuances when it comes to identifying satire. It would be fair comment, that to be able to do this in western society, results in a person being pigeon-holed as more intelligent than those, who are positioned by the text and their value systems, to read the language more seriously. If we can distance ourselves from such an observation, it becomes quite obvious that westernised society values the intellectuality of someone who can develop cynicism about the world around them, and yet also advocates a moral order which encourages the idealist notion of truth and sincerity. It is little wonder students become confused about interpretation at times!

Differences Between the Graded Groups with Elaboration

The most successful elaborators in the study were students in the Male A group. Because of the high usage of this category, chi square testing could be conducted. Their results in this category revealed a statistical significant difference at 1 degree of freedom at 0.05 probability. Their use rate, although the same as both male and females in the B group resulted in a positive differential of 8, whereas these other groups all indicated negative differentials between user and success rates of between 1 and 13. The Female A group used the strategy 7% more than the Male A group, but had 5% less success than this group. The Male A group seemed to elaborate in such a way that it matched with the expectations of the test makers.

In the bottom half, the Female C and Male D results were similar as were the Male C and Female D results. The latter group achieved the least amount of success
with a shared negative differential of 27. This differential emphasised that the elaboration these readers put in place about the content of the passages was very different to the students in the top half. It confirmed Quin’s explanation (1995) of student placement in the predetermined distribution in multiple choice reading tests and positioned them as students in the bottom half of the whole student population in the study. It also serves to highlight the need for students to use the same elaborative thought patterns as the top group in order to be more successful in multiple choice reading tests.

**Generalised the Meaning**

To be situated in this category students tended to always refer to the overall meaning of the passage in order to relate specific information to the question/answer relationships.

This strategy was not used widely but was encouraged through the wording of the question as it led students to explore the concerns of the whole passage. A few students used it for most questions, but the majority of its use in relation to *Mr Reginald Peacock’s Day* was with the first question of the passage, which asked the students to consider the main source of irony.

Responses of students included:

**Megan (A student):**

*The whole thing is about how he seems to be so outward, extroverted and up himself...he is pretty resentful of the situation that he is in but he can’t do anything*
about this though, so I would say it was D.

Mareena (C graded student):

*I think it is B because you can tell all the way through it that he is up himself and he doesn’t think his wife is capable of anything and yet he does nothing.*

Tony (A graded student):

*A... because we realise what Reginald is experiencing and overall I feel he is an egotist and loves himself. There isn’t irony between his idleness and his wife’s industry and we never get his wife’s view of him an D doesn’t ever come into it.*

Brad (B graded student):

*It is A because he talks about himself being so successful and in the class with his student he considers how he could have a relationship with her. We know that he is imperfect...lazy....talks about how he is overweight, not energetic. This brings him down but on the whole he is pretty certain of his own perfection. The rest of the choices don’t seem to come into it.*

With this question the male students emerged with the correct answer and both female students, with different answers from each other, chose alternatives that were not correct.

Megan and Mareena both emphasised the overall meaning of the passage and mentioned Reginald was “up himself.” Megan’s observation about the overall meaning
appeared to come to a standstill and prevented her from arriving at the item writers’ preferred meaning. The scriptual framing of her reasoning drew her to discuss Reginald’s entrapment which then led her to choose D. This was more likely to suit the contrast of Reginald in his confinement and where he would prefer to be. Although she seemed to read the tone of the passage as the item writers did, she moved to an alternative reading of this question with her final choice. This movement in her reasoning and interpretation reinforced the problem students had with the identification of satire, of which irony, of course, is a technique in shaping the reader’s response. 

In generalising the concerns of the whole passage Mareena chose the alternative which centred around Reginald’s idleness and his wife’s industry. She too acknowledged Reginald’s belief in his own perfection, but was also led away from this observation when the scriptual frames she called upon led her to make a judgement about Reginald’s view of his wife. The idea she had about Reginald not believing his wife could do anything, focussed her attention on alternative B which embodied the idea that his wife was industrious. Like Megan, she definitely had insight into Reginald’s faults and understood the irony the item writers were looking for, but moved her meaning to address the concerns of both characters in the text. She drew the contrast between the two characters whereas the item writers were looking for the contrast Reginald had of himself and the reader’s awareness of his limitations. She therefore comprehended effectively but chose the wrong alternative.

Tony and Brad’s responses tended to focus the overall meaning of the passage around the correct alternative. Both of them emphasised the contrast between his perfection and the reader’s awareness of his limitations. After making his choice, Tony eliminated the other possibilities as a way to check on his preferred meaning. Brad made reference to the text to support his ideas.
Megan and Mareena’s responses revealed how readers can make decisions about the overall meaning of the passage which may closely align with the preferred meaning of the item writers, but then choose alternatives which signal a lack of understanding. Their interpretation was not acceptable because there was only one correct answer. The irony here is that their responses actually indicated understanding. Such inconsistencies serve to highlight the inadequacies of multiple choice reading tests in testing critical literacy.

**Differences Between the Graded Groups with Generalised the Meaning**

This was a strategy which definitely favoured the top half of students. The A group used the strategy the most, and averaged a positive differential of 17 between user and success rates. What is interesting about the B group is that it was used very few times, but when used, gained a high percentage success rate. The Female B group’s positive differential for this strategy was 59 and the Male B group’s was 50. The bottom half of the student population used the strategy about the same as the B group, with less success but all achieved positive differentials.

**Generalised the Meaning** is definitely a higher order thinking skill in that students need to make judgements about the overall meaning of the passage. In this study they were required to summarise the main concerns of the text in order to make such judgements. The metacognitive strategy of being able to generalise the overall meaning of a passage in order to make meaning of its thematic concerns is therefore a highly desirable skill in readers; however, resistant readers can make different summarised meanings to those of item writers. The point to stress here is that this strategy is only valuable if a reader adopts the same scriptual frames, in order to make meaning, as those of the item writers.
The results indicated the A group clearly used the strategy the most, and achieved a fair amount of success. This further accents the thinking styles of the A group in their ability to attain correct results, which in this case was used most skilfully by the Male A group. The positive differentials of the other groups indicated that if they used this strategy more widely, they would have enjoyed more success. It is however, more complex because students do not necessarily have the social access to produce these thinking styles which ensure the right generalised meaning will evolve. It is evidenced in the results that the students in the other groups used the strategy very few times; this unfortunately does not mean that if they were to generalise the meaning on more occasions they would arrive at correct answers. It would always be dependent on what meaning they decided to generalise. The results for this category therefore only serve the purpose of further emphasising that generalising the meaning is a valuable higher order thinking skill, only if you interpret the scriptual frames as the item writers do, in their construction of question/answer relationships.

**Reasoned Through the Distractors**

This strategy tended to work interactively with students who chose the elimination strategy to make meaning of the question/answer relationships. Students not only eliminated the alternatives but reasoned through each alternative, working out why it matched or did not match their preferred reading.

Q.2 will be used to analyse responses:

The passage implies Reginald sees himself as

(a) an unworldly man who cannot cope with the practical details of life.
(b) a sensitive man whose wife is totally unsympathetic to his needs.
(c) a great artist constrained by a mundane and sordid marriage.
(d) a noble man who has made great sacrifices for his family.

The 'correct' answer is C.

Types of responses to exemplify this category include:

Rachel (A graded student):

D...because in the text it says "hadn't he three times..." which shows he is making sacrifices... like having to pay for Adrian's kindergarten. B and C fitted as well but with C he doesn't actually say he is a great artist and he also doesn't say that his marriage has ruined his artistic talent.

Rhys (A graded student):

A...I suppose I did this by elimination...not D...he didn't want to sacrifice himself for his family...but thinking about his wife she was the one who sacrificed. He wasn't sensitive and she woke him up too. So this leaves A and C which shows he wasn't able to cope with the practical part of life.

Brett (D graded student):

It is not A...because I don't think he is unworldly and can't cope. It is not D...he doesn't see himself as noble and the family was not really gone into. It is hard between B and C but I think he blamed the marriage he got into more than just on his wife so I would pick C.
All students eliminated the alternatives and tried to reason through why their preferred choice was the most suitable. Brett’s reasoning however, was the only one of the selected examples which was correct. All students adopted a scriptually implicit approach to the question/answer relationship because they addressed the alternatives from the perspective of how they envisaged Reginald viewed himself. In order to answer the question correctly, they had to align themselves with the view the item writers believed Reginald had of himself. This was further complicated by the possible intentions of the writer which the readers had to attempt to secure in their negotiated meaning.

Rachel’s reading revealed she needed literal information within the text in order to answer the question. She didn’t attempt to make implications about information and on two occasions insisted it could not be two alternatives because the information was not stated in the text. This showed she read for fine literal detail in order to make meaning, and because it wasn’t found, was unable to come up with the ironic reading of the passage, which required her to fill in the gaps of meaning not provided by the language. Her metacognitive skills were in this case used ineffectively and drew her to make only textually explicit observations about the text. Although she indicated a general understanding of alternatives, her preoccupation with finding proof led her to her incorrect choice. This is an example of an item where perhaps the student should have elaborated through her scriptual frames in order to take some risks with meaning.

Rhys’ reading is very complex. His reasoning led him to choose the alternative which focussed on Reginald not being able to cope with practicalities. He, however, drew comparisons between A and C which he did not qualify. The opening of his response indicated he understood the complex situation in that he could see that it was Reginald’s wife who appeared to really make the sacrifices. His observation about
Reginald being sensitive seemed to take on an altered meaning to that of the item writers. His view of Reginald appeared to have been shaped by the 1990’s version of what he believed was a sensitive man, often coined in phrase as “sensitive new age guy”. The intended meaning by the item writers contrasted with Rhys’s meaning because it focussed on an inability to cope with reality. Rhys’ exclamation that Reginald was not at all ‘sensitive’ when his wife woke him up, indicated he interpreted this part of the passage differently. The final sentence of his response drew attention to alternative A, and although he mentioned it connected to alternative C, he did not explain why this alternative did not match his preferred meaning.

Brett’s response indicated he generalised the overall meaning of the passage in relation to the question asked and matched the suitability of the individual alternatives to his own meaning. He then eliminated the alternatives until he was comfortable with alternative C as his preferred reading. He did not really focus attention to detail in the passage, as did Rachel and Rhys with this item, and relied on his general observations to make judgements about the alternatives.

Differences Between the Graded Groups with Reasoned Through the Distractors

This strategy was used the most by the Male A group. It was used 50% of the time and achieved a 55% success rate. Females in all groups used this strategy minimally, and males from other groups indicated a 13-30% range, with the user rate and a success range of between 41-59%.

This strategy linked closely with the elimination strategy which was generally favoured by male students. There were others of course who still reasoned through the distractors who did not eliminate but most eliminators reasoned through the distractors
as a way of checking on their elimination strategy.

*Reasoned through distractors* is another strategy which could be classified as a higher order thinking skill. Students would link the use of this strategy to the generalised meaning they had formed and work through the distractors from this perspective. The minimal use of this strategy with the bottom half of the population of students always indicated positive differentials when it was used; that is, they achieved a higher percentage rate of success in relation to the use rate. However, if it was used more by these students, the rate of success might drop because of their lack of access, cognitive or otherwise, in depicting the meaning required by the item writers to get the correct answers.

**Vocabulary**

Some students experienced vocabulary problems with a number of items in the study. For a student to be placed into this category they had to verbally express difficulty with the language or indicate through their responses a lack of understanding of a word in the context of the sentence.

The item which revealed the most difficulty for students in *Mr Reginald Peacock's Day* was Q.5 which required students to make meaning of the word "insatiable." They had to choose from the following alternatives:

(a) greedy
(b) impossible to satisfy
(c) dull and romantic
(d) ungrateful
Eighteen students indicated they had difficulty with the meaning of this word, and yet for this item, thirty three students chose correctly. This clearly revealed that some of those who expressed difficulty, managed to choose the correct answer. What these students did was approach the question with textual implicitness and linked the root of the word (sat) to “satisfy” in the alternative in order to choose the most likely response:

Cherise (D graded student):

*I think B... he thinks she is not satisfied with him... she has to be up annoying him instead of letting him rest. It is a guess but it sounds like the word satisfy because of the “sat” in the word.*

Liam (B graded student):

*Always wanting more... can’t be satisfied... worked this out by putting it into the passage and the word “satisfy” in the answer.*

Other students who failed to make the connection with the root of the word made judgements about Reginald’s wife without really considering that the word could have linked with the word “satisfy”:

Pauline (A graded student):

*Being an artist he wants to fantasise and he thinks his life is dull and unromantic.*
Diane (B graded student):

Could be B but I choose A...because he has just been talking about how much money he has and how much she wants which shows she is greedy...but B he is saying that before they were married she was easy to please and satisfy. When they got married it became impossible to satisfy her with anything ... she is always wanting more and more.

Stewart (A graded student):

Hard question...they could all be right. He talks about being married and her being insatiable which could mean greedy. I'll say A because it is being greedy and she has done nothing whilst he has worked so hard...so she is the one who is greedy.

Paul (C graded student):

I think because of the way he says it...insatiable that it would have to be D...you get the feeling that she is so ungrateful for all the work he has done.

The two female responses, although not similar themselves, were quite different from the two male responses which were very much the same. Although the two male students chose different alternatives, they focussed on Reginald’s wife being more grateful for his financial contribution. They appeared to have a sense of what the word meant in the context of the passage but used a scriptual frame in order for their preferred alternative to match their own understanding of the passage. This could be another example of scriptual implicitness in operation; in the past it has been culturally valued in society, that a wife be supportive of her husband’s financial contribution to the family.
Diane did not come across as definitive in her judgement of the wife’s lack of support but acknowledged generally that she was greedy. She linked the word “insatiable” to greedy because she defined this as “always wanting more.” This indicated she had an understanding of what the item was asking but was trying to define it to match her own meaning. A few students in the study indicated they did not think it would be the alternative: “impossible to satisfy” because it seemed too easy to choose an answer that had part of a word “sat” in a word of the alternative “satisfy”. This revealed that some students were very conscious of the item writers constructing the test and chose to go against what they thought was right because they didn’t believe the item writers would put in an item that appeared to be so easy.

Pauline’s response however, is quite baffling in that she made no connection at all with what the word might mean. She operated on a scriptual level where she became absorbed in the plight of the character. This is an example of poor metacognition in order to answer the question effectively.

**Differences Between the Graded Groups with Vocabulary**

The success rate indicated how much success students had with the percentage of times they indicated vocabulary difficulties. Overall, the groups used this category with similar frequency, with the Male A group using it the least. The success rate in the groups however did not indicate any patterns from which conclusions could be drawn. It appears that vocabulary difficulties had little influence on success but it is quite likely for students not to have understood some vocabulary, and it remained unnoticed, through what they said or did not say in their responses. It was also possible that some
students may have chosen not to indicate they were having vocabulary problems in case they felt embarrassed about their lack of understanding of a particular word. Every effort was made to observe and encourage students to express these difficulties but it is conceivable that some vocabulary difficulties were not mentioned by some students.

**Other Observations about the Data of Graded Students**

Tables 6.3, 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6 indicate the success rate of individual methods and metacognitive strategies which enables comparisons to be made about the way individual methods and strategies were used by the differently graded students in the study. Although it is interesting to compare the graded groups' individual use and success rate of methods and strategies, the results unfortunately are limited because they do not embody the complexity of the reading process.

One conclusion which can be drawn from the tabled results is that as students are represented in lower grades they use fewer overall combined strategies in order to choose their answers, and when they use these strategies, they do not necessarily get the answers right. This study suggests it is highly probable that students in higher graded groups employ more metacognitive strategies in order to get the right answers than the lower graded students, but they can still at times end up with results that are similar to the weaker students.

The data from some of the individual students in the graded groups supports this observation. In the top half of the population the Female A group did not perform as creditably as expected. Their user rate of strategies was fairly high in relation to the rest of the top half but their results were much poorer. Their scriptual frames to the question/answer relationships and their elaboration skills seemed to indicate their
resistance to the preferred readings of the texts. It is a group such as this, which has been identified as very able and has achieved results similar to a lower graded group, that is alarming for teachers. Teachers have problems justifying why the students’ preferred choices are incorrect because they can often see the students’ reasoning in arriving at answers. The students may seem to have in place the strategies needed to comprehend effectively but do not come up with the preferred answers in the test.

To exemplify this observation two students’ results from the top and bottom half of the student population will be examined. Two male students will be used so that the gendered reading practice variable will not influence other conclusions which could be drawn from the data. Mabib was graded by his teacher as an A grade student and Kyle was identified as a D grade student. Both students achieved a score of 16/34 for the overall testing.

The following table indicates the use of strategies and identifies their correct answers for the passage ‘Ruins Without Value’. Blank spaces indicate items which were not correct.
With this passage Kyle achieved a higher result than Mabib. They shared only two correct answers with this passage, and although Mabib achieved a lower score, he used more strategies than Kyle with each item to locate his preferred meaning. With the correct items they shared they used a few similar methods and strategies. Item 24 revealed they approached the question/answer relationship in the same textually implicit way, used a calculated choice for their method in processing the answer and both referred to the text. Mabib however, also inferred influences and generalised the meaning of the passage to lead him to his choice. The other question they shared as correct was Item 34. They approached the question/answer relationship in a scriptually implicit way but processed their answers differently. Mabib eliminated the information whilst Kyle indicated a calculated choice, which could have been an internalised process of any one of the methods but was not verbalised at interview. Kyle used elaboration
whereas Mabib did not. Mabib checked the text, inferred influences and generalised the meaning to lead him to his answer.

What can be gleaned from this table is that Kyle did not use any of the strategies which could be classified as higher order skills. He checked the text once in his efforts to locate meaning and made only general references to the text with half of the 'correct' answers. Mabib on the other hand used a wider range of strategies but these unfortunately resulted in fewer correct answers than Kyle for this particular passage.

Conclusions

The discussion about methods of choice and metacognitive strategies used by differently graded students indicates that the methods and strategies used by the Male A group served them well in being the most successful group in the study. Cognitive skills like: Elimination, Generalised the Meaning and Reasoned Through the Distractors were strongly favoured. However it must be remembered that this group were also the most successful at aligning themselves scriptually with the test makers. They were therefore using these strategies successfully within a scriptual frame which served them well. Their method of making choices through elimination and the higher order metacognitive skills of generalising the meaning, elaboration and reasoned through the distractors were strongly favoured and used more effectively.

Elaboration was the most successful metacognitive strategy used; theirs was the only group that achieved a positive differential between this strategy use and success rate. What it reveals, which is most important about understanding reading as a social act, is that readers who have elaborative styles which demonstrate certain ways of thinking are better performers in multiple choice reading tests. Readers who think in
alternate ways could perhaps practise using the metacognitive strategies which appeared to relate to success but this would not necessarily promise success in multiple choice tests. This was evidenced with the Male A group themselves. They were not always consistent in performance; it appeared to depend on whether or not their scriptual frame for reading matched that of the item writers. Two of the top group in fact achieved scores as low as some of the D graded students. With this in mind it is important to consider how the performances of the remaining males in this group lifted overall performance and could lead assumptions to be made about all Male A groups being successful in multiple choice reading tests. This will be discussed in the next section under the heading of gender differences

Section Four

Gender Differences in Reading the Multiple Choice Test

The overall results of the students' performance indicated that girls achieved slightly better results. This, however, does not indicate the range and mean of the individual groups' scores within the study. The range of scores allows insight into how it is possible for individual scores in some graded groups to pull the scores down for a particular group, and affect the overall performance of that group and/or gender. It appeared that, although girls outperformed the boys slightly in overall performance, the range of the girls' results was more narrow. Table 6.8 identifies the mean and range of each individual group within their graded categories.
Table 6.8 clarifies the wider range of the male students in the overall population (5-27) and the more narrow range in the female population in the study (11-23). The range of the whole population of the male group reveals that it carried some very poor results in the lower half of the student population, whereas the whole female population’s range realised only a range of 12 marks compared to 22 marks for the whole of the male students in the study. The representation of the mean of each group indicated clearly that the top half of the student population performed much better than the lower half of the student population. The mean for the males in the top half of the population was 18.6 and the mean for the females was 17.25. No student in the lower half of the student population scored higher than 18, and in this half of the student population the females performed better than the males. The mean for the males in the lower half of the student population was 11.9 and the female mean was 13.2. This suggests that multiple choice tests may advantage top male students and discriminate against weaker male students, whereas these tests do not appear to discriminate as effectively between differently graded female students. This tends to confirm my original proposition that multiple choice tests do not necessarily identify the most able female students.

This chart, although suitable for identifying the mean and range of student
scores, does not show how individual students’ results affected a particular graded group or a male/female group. Table 6.9 identifies the number of ‘correct’ results for each student. Each number at the heading of the table represents the school from which a student was selected for the sample. Students within the graded groups who pull performance down are easily identified. In the Male A group Students 1 and 5 contribute to the mean being lower. In the Female A group Students 5 and 6 pull the mean score for this group down. As the other students have only scored average results for a multiple choice reading test, the whole group appears to have done poorly in relation to the Male A group. The B groups also have two poor performers in both the male and female groups.

Table 6.9

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As mentioned previously, this suggests that the Male A students use more effective strategies within a scriptual frame which matches that of the item writers. However, a closer examination of the categories used by the males and females reveals some interesting data about the gendering of reading practices. To illustrate the difference in the way a male from the A group approached responses compared to a female student, the top female student (Diane), who shared the same amount of ‘correct’
answers as a Male A student (Rhys), will be used to compare the strategies the students accessed for making meaning of the question/answer relationships. Both students achieved a score of 23/34. Diane emerged from the B group.

Diane and Rhys shared 14 items which resulted in correct answers. The methods and strategies which overlapped included referred to the text (5 times), checked the text, inferred influences and elaboration (twice each). Other categories used by Rhys to arrive at answers included: reasoned through the distractors, generalising the meaning and elimination. Categories used by Diane included generalising the meaning and calculated choice. No item where both students generalised the meaning was a shared correct answer.

They did not use the same method to process the information. Rhys eliminated and Diane used a calculated choice method.

The data of the metacognitive strategies used by these these two students could suggest that to refer to the text, check the text, inference effectively and elaborate on the content of the text, results in more correct answers. However, the students patterned the same strategies with the other items which were not correct, so it reveals very little other than, with the items these two students shared as correct, they were able to identify the preferred reading of the item writers. Of the other nine items which were not shared as correct but resulted in correct answers for them individually, they both indicated generalised the meaning as a strategy to get the right answers. This revealed that with these other nine items they failed to negotiate the same generalised meaning as each other, but were able to, with a different nine items, identify the item writers’ preferred meaning of the question/answer relationships. This serves to highlight that no meaningful conclusions can really be drawn with the different methods and strategies of
getting the answers right. What works for some question/answer relationships fails to get correct answers with others. It is only in the justification of their choices that judgements can really be made regarding comprehension skills, and even then, it is possible for them to resist the preferred reading set in place by the item writers.

The categories however, revealed differences between the way males and females approached the processing of information.

The Major Differences Between the Way Males and Females Processed Their Responses

The different methods and strategies used by students in the male and female groups to achieve correct answers, appeared to be in the following categories: Elimination, Contemplation, Calculated Choice, Checked the Text and Reasoned through the Distractors.

The favoured processing method of male students in the whole of the student population was eliminating the choices until they arrived at their preferred answer whereas female students tended to contemplate more of the possibilities. One strategy which linked in closely to the male students eliminating, was the way they reasoned through the distractors. There were students though, who did not eliminate and still reasoned through the distractors. The major difference in the linking of the elimination and reasoned through the distractors was the apparent decisiveness of the male responses. The verbalisation of the processing of information of the female students often came across as less decisive. Even when females did not readily verbalise how they were processing information, through the use of the calculated choice strategy, the modality of their answers led me to believe they were less sure of the reasoning
supporting their selection. The modality of their responses did not however, affect the number of correct answers they achieved. On the other hand, the male population appeared more decisive and confident with their answers but did not necessarily always choose correct answers. The differences in the modality of male and female responses indicated there were differences in how male and female students felt about multiple choice reading tests.

One interesting observation I noted during the course of the interviews was the overall approach of males and females to sitting multiple choice reading tests. The majority of males in the study indicated they liked doing multiple choice tests because they did not have to 'write a lot', and some of the male students who achieved even very low scores believed they were good at multiple choice tests. The female students on the other hand revealed a dislike of this form of testing because they could not justify the way they read the passages; the majority of the female students believed they were not good at multiple choice reading tests.

In the lower half of the student population it was most evident that the males took more risks with their answers. Although there were only a few students who randomly chose answers, they were those males in the lower half of the student population in the study. This risk taking evidenced itself in other ways. In the whole of the student population, females checked the text more often than males and this resulted in statistical significance in favour of females achieving correct answers through the use of this strategy. The way the females checked the text also showed their fear of taking more risks with the information in the text. There was a number of females who not only checked the text once for each item but checked information up to three times before making decisions about the available alternatives. These female students also tended to sub vocalise the section they checked as another way of checking their meaning. The
way males checked the text was often very fleeting in approach. If a question led them back to a certain line in the text, they generally scanned the information and were far more decisive in giving their answers. There were however exceptions in both the male and female populations in relation to how they used this strategy.

The following responses to questions from "Ruins Without Value" demonstrate the various ways of processing the information, and illustrate the strategies used and level of modality of the male and female students' responses. These responses are from a variety of questions in the passage and the content of student responses do not relate to each other because the responses are for different questions. Discussion of these responses follows these examples.

Male Responses

A Grade

*It is B because the title indicates they didn't value the sites so they fell into ruins...there is nothing of importance or interest there now. Because of what I know the Germans are not be ashamed of that aspect now. D was not what the passage was about so it was out of Band C. B was closer because Nazis don't have the importance now so the sites are neglected.*

(Checked the text for information. Answer was incorrect.)

B Grade

*A is the answer. People do not really want to go there. A and B were correct and emphasise people don't really want to go there. It isn't C because it doesn't seem worth*
going out of your way to see it because it is neglected. It is suggesting nobody really
wants to go there because it is neglected.
(Did not check the text. Answer was ‘correct’)

C Grade

It is A because to me at 16 living in this society I can see there will always be hate and
man can be Neanderthal. It creates visions of some dark beasts flying through the
forest. The dark tree could be beauty but there is a dark side ...the poison. It happened
in the 1940’s and it will happen again in the future because man is always on a big
power trip trying to prove he is better.
(Did not check the text. Answer was ‘correct’)

D Grade

The answer is C because he wouldn’t have put all the directions in the passage if he did
not want people to go and see it.
(Did not check the text. Answer was incorrect.)

Female Responses

A Grade

None fitted. I didn’t really know what to choose for this. Some people do get up
sometimes and talk about the past. Maybe it is C because he is trying to recapture the
past and he probably thinks it is useless doing that, you know bringing back something
he didn’t even want to bring back. So I think it is C.
B Grade

I think B because the author is trying to saying that historical sites are important. I'm not really sure though whether he is saying they should be forgotten or neglected. Is he trying to to say the place that this occurred is an important place and should not be forgotten?

(Checked the text. Answer was incorrect.)

C Grade

I'm not sure again..can't remember about this but it probably refers to the darkness and isolation but I wouldn't pick that one...if you look at the literal meaning of it...it could be B or if you looked at it deeper it could be D. So knowing these tests you probably are not supposed to read into it.

(Checked the text. Answer was incorrect.)

D Grade

I think it is C because these people want to forget about their past and the passage doesn't show you their true values of today and I think they would rather forget about it.

(Did not check the text. Answer was correct.)

Modality

The weaker modality of the female responses is clearly illustrated through phrases like:
I think I'm not sure probably you know
maybe can't remember you are not supposed to
it could be trying to say whether it is this or

The male responses did not reveal this level of indecisiveness but it did not necessarily indicate that because they had more modal strength their answers were correct. Their decisiveness surfaced through actually saying phrases like:

It is B The writer is saying He wouldn't write it if
It creates It isn't It was not

The use of verbs without modifiers preceding them made their responses appear to be more sound in their reasoning even if they weren't.

Other Issues

What led the examples of the Male B and C graded responses to correct answers was not necessarily their stronger modality but the level of alignment with the item writer's preferred meaning. The students' use of the elaboration strategy revealed this alignment. The B graded student was quite repetitious in his emphasis about people not really wanting to go to the Zeppelinfield and eliminated the other alternatives in order for him to be certain about the meaning he chose. The Male C graded student elaborated well outside the concerns of the text but these scriptual frames enabled him to choose the correct alternative. This is very interesting because his reasoning about the information revealed little distancing from the content of the passage, and although he achieved the correct answer, he did not demonstrate a high level of understanding about the question.
The only correct female response in this selection appeared to ‘clinch’ the correct alternative because she did not indicate through any discussion why the other alternatives were not correct.

It was more apparent in the examples of the male responses why other alternatives did not serve their preferred meanings. The females in this selection contemplated the possibilities and then justified their selected choice rather than discuss why it wasn’t any of the other alternatives. The Female B and C graded students appeared to be least confident, this revealed itself through the weaker modality of their responses. The Female B student ended up asking a rhetorical question about the alternative as a way of deciding her meaning, but in doing so, came across as though she was not at all sure of the answer she was giving. The Female C student was so concerned about whether it could be a literal meaning or deeper meaning that she appeared to lose sight of making her own meaning of the text. What she did reveal though, was how difficult it was for students to make decisions about the frames used by the item writers for each question/answer relationship.

These differences between the male and female responses only served to illustrate gendered differences in how they processed the test items, rather than differences in their ability to comprehend in multiple choice tests. These gendered reading practices highlighted the way male and female reading practices led readers to approach question/answer relationships in different ways. One could not predict whether greater confidence with the task would improve the performance of females. In the Case studies section, the responses of individual students will further serve the purpose of illustrating that it is the capacity of the reader to access the scriptual frames chosen by the item writers, which is the key to achieving well in this form of testing.
The results to this point suggest that success in multiple choice reading tests is most closely aligned to the ability of the student to access the scriptual frames used by the item writers. Some students appeared to have the capacity to do this more than others and this capacity did not necessarily always relate to the metacognitive strategies students were able to access. In order to demonstrate this more clearly, the reading practices of four students will be examined more fully. The discussion of these students's reading practices will further support the idea that there is no definite pattern of reading strategies which allows access to correct answers, although the scriptual frames chosen by the student is highly influential.

Students selected for these case studies include Stina, Marcus, Phuong and Luke. The case study for Stina is the longest case study because I want to demonstrate how one student processed all the questions for one passage and then relate these responses with those used with the other passages. The case study about Marcus depicts how a student can decide to never check the text and still achieve a very high result. Phuong's reading practices reveal she has limited access to cultural knowledge which would enable her to frame the question/answer relationships in the way chosen by the item writers. Luke's reading practices indicate his lack of motivation to achieve with the test.
Case Study One

The Students Who Discussed Correct Answers and Then Decided Against Them

Stina

Stina warmed readily to the idea of explaining the way she processed information and was also forthcoming with personal details. She came from a large Dutch/Italian family and was the third child of five; there was a gap of nineteen years between the oldest and youngest child. She attended a co-educational Government school in an inner city suburb where a large proportion of the population was from various ethnic backgrounds. During the interview Stina told the story of her parents who met after World War II and how they had no way of communicating with each other. She explained how they fell in love and had to learn how to speak English so they could understand each other. They spoke English at home and did not possess television because her parents did not like the way it influenced children. This did not appear to upset her and she indicated that she spent much of her spare time reading which she enjoyed immensely.

Stina was graded as an A level student, and of the female students who were graded at this level, achieved the second highest mark: 19/35. She chose six answers which were considered the highest probable distractors (the preferred choices which were not correct) of the State student population who sat the examination in the years from which the passages were taken. These preferred choices of the State student population out-numbered the correct answers for those six items.

Stina was chosen as a case study because she showed high order skills in
processing information, but selected a high proportion of different answers from those preferred by the item writers, after having discussed the correct answers as viable possibilities. Of the 35 items, Stina chose 19 correct answers and 6 high distractors. She discussed the correct answer in her reasoning of her preferred choice in 7 items. This was the highest number of times in the study that a student discussed the correct answer and then decided against it.

**Categories Used**

The passage “Teaching Whites a Lesson” (Appendix E) will be dealt with in detail to show the level of manipulation of the items on her understanding of the passage. Because of the way the question/answer relationships from some items influenced choices with other items, it is most important for the purposes of this case study to follow through the way different alternatives affected her choices in selecting other answers. A brief discussion will follow, contrasting her performance in this passage to the other passages in the test.

Overall, Stina read very quickly, checked the text with 21 items, made reference to the text frequently, elaborated with a number of items and inferred influences. Her reasoning appeared to be thorough and she took me through her processing step by step. In the first passage “Teaching Whites a Lesson” she appeared to construct the relationships with question/answers similarly to the way the item writers had; that is she determined the same items that required textually explicit, textually implicit or scriptually implicit approaches, yet her processing led her to make final choices which were not necessarily the same as the item writers. Stina’s level of metalinguistic understanding emerged immediately. With the very first answer she indicated how the title helped her and that the tone of the language guided her to make her response:
Example 1.

"The heading helped but the tone made me choose between B and D. The tone of D was lighter"

**Discussing the 'Correct Answer' and then Deciding Against it**

With this passage she chose to discuss the correct answer with three items before choosing other alternatives. Reasoning of her choices indicated a high level of understanding of these items. Responses included:

Example 2:

"Had to go and skim read the first paragraph again - I chose C and also A. A made too much of a judgement on white society and I didn't think that was what the passage was really about"

Example 3:

"Toss up between B and C - I don't know exactly what conciliatory means but I thought it could have something to do with reconcile. I chose B because I know exactly what it means and it could definitely apply to the first paragraph"

Example 4:

"Toss up between B and D - chose B - I thought - I know they are aboriginal - they gave personal experience and to give validity to the views they were talking about they
In Example 2 she aligned herself with the reading the item writers appeared to give in a later question - the answer to this later question being a 'conciliatory' tone (although she did not choose this response when she came to answer that question) and chose the incorrect response: *white society believes in teaching facts, while aboriginal society is concerned with values.*

As with her first answer she did not believe the tone of the passage invited a response which indicated the speaker was making a judgement about white society and therefore chose a response that was less forceful about judgements of the material wealth of whites; therefore she rejected the correct answer: *white society values material wealth while aboriginal society values social justice.* Because Stina indicated in her first response that the tone of the passage did not make a harsh judgement on the whites she resisted the reading given by the item writers in Example 2, because she believed it was making this judgement. She therefore chose an answer which was more acceptable to her own reading. It is possible to examine the 'correct' alternative and show how she did not reason through the choice to realise it was not about facts; however the 'correct' alternative attempted to position her to criticise white behaviour and she felt the passage did not indicate such a strong response.

In Stina's attempt of the question which related to tone, she experienced some difficulty with the meaning of the word 'conciliatory' and although she made connections to 'reconcile', she believed the speaker was 'impassioned' about the topic and elected to remain with the safety of the word she knew. Most students in the study felt uncomfortable with this question because of the vocabulary. Stina's choice of an impassioned reading could be supported through the way language is used in the text.
The writer uses imperatives throughout the first paragraph to the extent that it would be possible to take on the three alternatives: 'provocative', 'hostile' and 'impassioned' before considering the correct choice 'conciliatory'. The modality of the imperative used also signals a direct order which is used to encourage whites to behave in a certain way. It could be read as "impassioned" using terms like: "You need to understand"; "Your society has too successfully subjugated us"; "Aboriginal people...have shown the rest of society how to overcome"; and "It is important that all Australians...".

With Example 4 Stina used the contemplation method as with Example 2. She considered both choices but only reasoned through one verbally. It would be interesting to see what would have occurred in the processing of information if she had reasoned through the choices she finally rejected in both these questions. She elected in both cases to discuss and reason through her preferred choices and felt comfortable with them on both occasions. It is my belief that she shied away from the correct choice because it mentioned the word political; the word itself is not mentioned in the passage. The choices are quite close and both relate to the individual perspective giving some sort of validity. 'Generalising from personal experience' is a phrase used often in English classrooms to explain how a writer can position a reader's response, and it is possible, as indicated in other students' responses that she nominated the 'safer' response because as with Example 3, it was what she 'knew'.

With the thirteen items in this passage Stina used the elimination/contemplation method seven times in order to answer the questions. She used it successfully five times; but used it unsuccessfully twice to reject the correct answer.

Stina used the contemplation method twice and each time she did this she chose the incorrect response:
Example 2.

"Had to go and skim read the first paragraph again - I chose C and also A. A made too much of a judgement on white society and I didn't think that was what the passage was really about"

Example 5.

I chose A. I skim read the main points - one third of the essay is on values so I think it would go on to A - like the education policies to be used for that sort of thing"

With Example 5 Stina contemplated the way one alternative in one item served another alternative in another item. This helped her build her meaning of the text. She recognised that the speaker of the passage indicated throughout the passage, the negativity of the white values of society, and also the need to educate young Australians about the Aboriginal movement. Stina's reasoning suggested that the writer perhaps would go on to link these ideas; educating people against having materialistic values. This reasoning fits in fairly well with the very last sentence "Aboriginal people have radically different concepts of the land." Stina connected concepts; making decisions about what would possibly come next and therefore focussed on the contrasting concepts between whites and aborigines about the land. She considered it highly probable that a writer could go on to discuss the ways whites could become more in tune with the Aboriginal way of viewing the land. She connected this reasoning to alternatives mentioned in earlier items. While she was careful in Example 2 not to choose something which indicated a negative judgement on the whites, she considered it more than a possibility, that the writer perhaps might go on to discuss ways education
could be used to make whites less materialistic in Example 5. Considering both ideas are a part of the passage it is a possibility that a writer would do this. The preferred response of item writers: "argue the case for Aboriginal land rights" may seem a logical progression from the previous paragraph in the passage which examines the Aborigines' relationship with the land but it is also a possibility that some readers may think that the case for land rights has already been covered in this paragraph, especially with references like:

- difficult to comprehend for people whose history only goes back a couple of hundred years";
- "This is one of the problems people have when the issue of sacred sites comes up";
- "They don't understand that thousands of generations of aboriginal people lived and died here"

Some readers may have believed it repetitive to go on further about the land rights and would select another alternative. With the remaining items in this passage Stina used a calculated choice method and on each occasion chose the right answer. She did not indicate in her responses whether she eliminated or contemplated, however these methods could have been employed but not verbalised as such at interview. For example:

Example 6.

*I re-read the last two paragraphs and found B best explains the answer to that one*

Example 7.

*"Read sentence “When I went....” and drew my conclusion - it showed in the sentence they left out things and didn’t really explain things about them, that’s why*
oversimplification and silence have been used to misrepresent Aborigines”

With both these responses Stina directed herself to the text. Her reasoning in Example 6 was internalised as she appeared to consider it unnecessary to verbalise her choice. The majority of the State population taking this test in 1990 also chose the ‘correct’ answer; it would therefore suggest that the no other alternative matched closely with the preferred answer of the item writers and this led most students to select the ‘correct’ answer.

In Example 7 she made direct reference to the text and quoted from it to support the answer she selected. In her response she revealed she understood the way the aborigines had been silenced by the way things had been left out about them in history which suggested she understood their lack of voice. By saying “didn’t really explain things”, it indicated she understood that oversimplification meant that the complexities of the issues were not examined.

With the other extracts Stina used similar strategies to negotiate meaning but did not perform as creditably in achieving correct answers:

Table. 6.11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breakdown of Stina’s Discussion of Passages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. Correct</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching Whites a Lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Reginald Peacock’s Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruins Without Value</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The table establishes how closely Stina managed to come to aligning her choices with those of the item writers. It is interesting to see that she was not consistent with all the passages. Her lack of consistency did not relate to the order in which she responded to the passages as she scored more highly in the third passage: “Ruins Without Value” than the second: “Mr Reginald Peacock’s Day.” It would appear that with the second passage she resisted the reading preferred by the item writers. She chose four highly probable distractors and resisted the ‘correct’ answer three times.

With both these remaining passages she continued to use the same categories as she did with “Teaching Whites a Lesson”, however it was her alignment with Reginald in the second passage that resulted in her choosing other alternatives. Like many other readers she found it difficult to be severely critical of Reginald and aligned herself with his sense of entrapment in the marriage.

With some of the items she indicated that the choices provided by the item writers did not encapsulate fully her understanding of the complex situation Reginald was placed in. She felt herself drawn to the more general answers, and my perception of the data is that she could not align herself with the feminist reading and therefore was drawn to alternatives that best matched her own understanding of the passage.

“Ruins Without Value” was the passage in which she discussed the least number of correct answers, yet she still managed to choose three highly probable distractors. With this passage Stina revealed that when a question/answer relationship was not determined as scriptually implicit she succeeded in choosing the correct answer. One such example is a question which asks:

The main patterns of imagery which the passage uses to evoke the public ritual of
Nazism are the

(a) allusions to madness and violence
(b) metaphors of evil and oppression
(c) references to darkness and isolation
(d) theatrical effects created by light and noise

Although the relationship is not textually explicit, the information about light and noise threads through the passage and should signal a reader to be drawn to this alternative. Therefore, the metacognitive strategies she called on when the question/answer relationships were obviously textually implicit, indicated that she was a good reader. However, when it came to determining scriptually implicit relationships Stina was not successful. A question which appeared to be on the surface quite literal in its investigation resulted in Stina pulling from her own schemata in order to negotiate meaning:

The directions in paragraph 2 on how to find the Zeppelinfield

(a) emphasise that it is out of the way and neglected.
(b) suggest a confusing and difficult route.
(c) reinforce the idea that it is worth going out of one's way to see the ruins.
(d) evoke the underhandedness and oppression associated with Nazism.

The correct answer is A but Stina chose C:

"It doesn't seem so hard to get there for me (referring to the A alternative) but then he wouldn't put it in there if he didn't think it was worthwhile to go there - he just wouldn't
put it in (referring to alternative C). I found this a hard question to decide.

What Stina did here was make a personal judgement about the difficulty in getting to the Zeppelinfield. She called on scriptual frames from her schemata which related to the difficulties of using public transport and made the decision that it really was not that difficult to get there, although she indicated indecision here because she wondered why it would be put in as a choice. As did other students with this item, she decided that the emphasis on it not being easy to get to, meant that it must be worthwhile going to see, otherwise why would the writer give the directions to get there? She took a more commonsensical approach to the text and arrived at an answer more in keeping with her own value system.

Stina to me demonstrated a critical understanding of the way language operated in each text and was an example of a reader who felt it important that the alternatives she chose matched her reading of the passage. With some items she definitely indicated how it could be read another way but always chose those answers which sat more comfortably with her own framing.

Case Study 2

The Boy Who Did Not Check the Test and Achieved the Highest Score

Marcus

Marcus emerged from the Male A group and achieved the highest score in the whole of the student population. He approached the reading of the passages in a different way from the other students, and although this worked for him, it does not
indicate that other students would end up with the better results if they used the same strategies.

Marcus scored 27/34 and chose 5 highly probable distractors in his answers. His main methods and strategies used for making meaning included: elimination, calculated choice, referred to text and elaboration. The other strategies which were used the most widely by the A group were not tabled as being used by Marcus. Most of Marcus's reasoning of information was internalised but he always gave precise reasons for his choices. It is therefore, quite possible that all these other strategies used by the top male group were used by him, but were internalised. This internalisation of processing the information was what led me to strike the metalinguistic category from the study. Although I knew Marcus and other students possessed excellent comprehension, skills it was too difficult to locate a marker to categorise what was said and left unsaid by them in order to evidence this skill. Nevertheless, I believed he possessed higher order thinking in his verbalisation of responses. He was very quick to make decisions about question/answer relationships, and although he did not indicate generalising the meaning of question/answer relationships, his responses revealed he could distance himself from the immediacy of the content of the passages.

As soon as he was given the signal to start, he read the first passage with more speed than any other student in the study and then read all the questions and available alternatives. No other student approached the test in this manner. They all read the passages and then began to answer the questions one at a time. Perhaps Marcus' decision to firstly read all the questions and available alternatives enabled him to formulate more of an opinion about what he considered was the item writers' preferred meaning of the passages. This could have allowed him to align himself with the scriptual frames of the item writers.
After Marcus began to answer the questions, he did not check the text for any item. I kept wondering if he had a photographic memory because at no time did he suggest a need to go back to locate information or to check meaning, even with question/answer relationships which tended to lead students to do so. He then repeated the same pattern for the remaining passages.

His style of thinking, that is framing of the text, was closely aligned to that of the item writers. Sometimes it just seemed as though the ‘correct’ alternative was the most obvious one for him to choose. Examples of such responses include:

*It just seems as if he is saying I'm paying enough for you and the child...what more do you want?*

*D...Aborigines have a lot to offer whites and whites have benefited so much already from the examples and it is pretty much saying that they would benefit in the future*

*People would rather forget about it being the Kongresshalle...like nobody will admit it was.*

Marcus’ answers were all about this length and he just seemed to pick up on the same scriptual and elaborative framing as the preferred choices required.

Marcus’ reading practices further indicate the complexity in understanding the way readers process information, and also serve to highlight that there are no consistent patterns to follow in order to be successful in these tests, other than the reader adopting the same scriptual framing as the item writers.
Case Study 3

The Girl With Little Access to Cultural Meanings

Phuong

Phuong was identified by her teacher as a C graded student. The teacher informed me that she worked very hard and was highly motivated to achieve critical literacy. She scored 11/34 in the overall test and chose 4 highly probable distractors. Her main method of processing information in order to make meaning included: Elimination, Contemplation, Elimination and Contemplation and the Calculated Choice methods. No pattern emerged; for some she used one method and for other items, another method. Metacognitive strategies identified in her responses included: Vocabulary Difficulties, Checked the Text, Referred to Text, Elaboration, Generalised the Meaning and Reasoning through the Distractors.

Examples of her responses:

Correct Responses

In A it seems as though they are blaming and I don’t think it is blaming. I think it is B too but it isn’t everything it is trying to say so I come to D.

B isn’t really right, C its not going into the paragraph A which is what the question asked. D is myth and tradition and no myth here so I chose A.

It is a difficult and confusing route but it isn’t what he is trying to say here. It could be A...it is neglected...people are passing there...Japanese tourists having photos. Maybe
I shouldn't choose D. I'm not sure what it means but I sort of know what it means. I'll spend more time on it. I'll choose A because the place is not taken care of and how you were told to get there...go here...there...out of the way...people don't take the time to go.

Incorrect

Back to line 25 and 26...didn't take much notice at first...I first read answers I am given then I'll go back so I know what I am looking for. When I first read it I didn't know it was him he was talking about. I choose C but I want to choose all of them because I didn't know which one...half child...when you think of a child you think of helpless.

I do not understand what it means by occupation with Hitler so I think it is really that I do not understand...Occupation means job but it doesn't seem to mean that in this one.

Phuong's responses indicated how earnest she was in trying to locate correct answers. In the answers selected for the case study, the first two correct answers revealed a variety of strategies in place, and excellent interpretation of the question/answer relationships. The third correct answer also revealed sound strategy use but signalled her indecision about the alternatives. With this response and the two incorrect responses, she revealed her lack of understanding of English. Although she knew what words meant she did not always know what they meant in context. With the final response she discussed the word "occupation", and although she knew that the usual meaning of the word was not appropriate for this question, she did not have available, the scriptual frames necessary to locate another meaning.

Her weak modality made her reasoning appear insecure but in the answers which
were correct, it was most evident that she retrieved information from the text if she had access to the scriptual frames of the text. Her first two correct responses indicated she was drawn to the concerns of the question when she declared that one of the alternatives was not even in the first paragraph so should not be considered.

Phuong explained that the hardest texts for her to read were narratives. She said it was sometimes difficult to understand what the words meant in the story and that sometimes they meant something and other times the meaning changed. Her results for the passage “Mr Reginald Peacock’s Day” supported her belief about her problems with narratives because she failed to score in this passage.

Phuong’s problem with language in context exemplifies the problems many ESL students have when attempting multiple choice reading tests. Although they have an overall understanding of vocabulary, their limited access to the social situations which reveal the fluidity of meaning, often results in them being marginalised because they have little access to the dominant readings being privileged in that text. This lack of access may contribute to migrants being over-represented in the bottom half of the student population who are aiming to attain credentials through examinations such as the TEE English exam.

Case Study 4

The Lowest Scoring Candidate

Luke

Luke’s teacher explained that he did not really want to be at school. She said he
was a very pleasant boy and wanted to take part in the study but had no real motivation to achieve. He just wanted to go out and get a job. Luke’s responses in the early part of the interview supported his teacher’s comments but as he got more involved with the passages he started to give much better explanations. These explanations however resulted in very few correct answers.

Overall he scored 5/34 and chose 8 highly probable distractors. He approached most question/answer relationships in a scriptually implicit way and processed information by making calculated choices. He randomly chose two answers. He only expressed vocabulary difficulty with one item, checked the text twice, referred to the text once and elaborated with four items.

To demonstrate how he changed his attitude to the test, and thus the categories used from the beginning of the test to the end, a few of his responses are included below:

First Passage

I guessed that one really but it was the closest.

It is telling the history before white settlement.

This proves there were people before white settlement

Final Passage

The title of the passage is telling us how nobody cares about the history so they let the historical sites fall apart. They do not want to remember the war they all went through.
Well no-one actually told Hitler what these men were doing to all the others... it doesn’t say this... but nobody went up and told Hitler what the men were doing to the people.

As he became more involved in making his own meaning he developed greater animation about ideas and began to extend answers. He elaborated more in the final passage than in the other two texts in the test but unfortunately none of the responses included in this sampling were correct answers.

What I believe Luke’s interview revealed to me, was the way that motivational factors affect reader’s metacognitive capacity to draw on skills in order to make meaning. It was quite evident that Luke was a low achieving student but he had located the main thrust of meaning of the passages in the test. His inability to access the correct answers could be a result of weak cognitive ability, or perhaps a combination of this and the social patterning has shaped his lack of desire to achieve in a scholastic setting. His lack of engagement with the task may also mean that he has been accustomed to allowing different aspects of texts to become a potent focus for activating scriptual knowledge rarely used by the item writers.
CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyse the processes students moved through when negotiating the meaning of the multiple text structures in multiple choice reading tests. Forty eight Year 11 students were chosen for the study and these were representative of wide socio-economic backgrounds, gender and ability levels. The stimulus for the study arose out of concern about the level of failure of students who appeared to have excellent comprehension skills but could not achieve high results in multiple choice reading tests. It was hypothesised that the different reading positions selected by students resulted not necessarily from a lack of cognition, but in the various socialisation factors which contribute to readers making alternative readings of the same texts.

Conclusions

The data of the study confirm the complexity of the reading process and indicate that the social and cognitive domains of reading are interactive. All focal areas of the study point to the same major finding, which embodies the notion that methods and strategies for negotiating the correct answers in multiple choice comprehension tests only assist metacognitive comprehension if the reader can align their reading with the reading preferred by the item writers.

Question/Answer Relationships

The question/answer relationships became a pivotal point in the study. The approach students chose to take with each set of questions and possible answers was
crucial in establishing whether there would be alignment or resistance with the preferred reading of the item writers. Pearson and Johnson's (1978) work relating to the relationship between question and answers was confirmed in the study. Students framing of meaning sometimes linked with the linguistic structures of the text but was more often dependent on the schemata operating to trigger what they believed were textual implications within the text. The importance of alignment, referred to in Tierney and Pearson's 'Composing Model of Reading' (1985) appears to be of particular importance in helping students to achieve success in multiple choice reading tests. The results of the study revealed that in relation to the item writers’ preferred meanings, the more a student was called on to use a scriptually implied approach, the less likely they would achieve correct answers; the scriptual approach being dependent on alignment with the patterns of interpretation of the item writers. The students with the most success in scriptual implicitness were the students in the Male A group. This result confirmed Quin's (1995) explanation of how the multiple choice paper is trialled; items being manipulated until the top group achieves the best results.

Methods and Strategies Used By Students

Results indicated that students used a variety of methods and strategies to negotiate meaning. Although there were some methods and strategies which the top group appeared to use to achieve more success, it did not mean other students who used these strategies would achieve correct answers. This result linked back to the framing taken by the students in order to negotiate meaning. If the students called on scriptual frames which did not align with the preferred meaning of the item writers, it did not matter how many times they used particular methods and strategies that appeared to be used by the top students; they would be using different schemata to make meaning and this meaning would not necessarily be the same as the item writers. What became a
pattern with many students was adopting the same set of methods and strategies in order to select responses to questions. However, even in doing this, there would be times when some methods and strategies would be used and not others. No consistent pattern emerged with the data to suggest that one category, or a particular set of categories ensured more success. The use of the methods and strategies always clearly linked back to the scriptual frames used by the reader to negotiate meaning.

**Differences Between the Graded Students**

Results indicated that students identified in the top half of the student population performed more creditably than students in the bottom half of the student population. This also confirmed Quin’s explanation of how the multiple choice paper is developed. The students in the Male A group were clearly the best performers in the study, although on the whole, female students statistically emerged with marginally higher results. These overall results however do not reveal the poor performances within each individually graded group which skewed results in particular grades. The very weak performance of female students in the A group confirmed my own findings and others (Edelsky, 1991; Gillet & Temple, 1990) regarding students who perform well in the rest of subject English but achieve poor results in multiple choice reading tests. These students used methods and strategies which revealed higher order cognitive skills but resisted the dominant reading of the passage which resulted in incorrect answers.

The importance of aligning with the scriptual frames of the item writers perhaps helps explain why ethnic students are over represented in the bottom half of the student population. This reveals that perhaps students’ socio-cultural backgrounds influence their placement in subject English. It further reinforces the importance of students accessing the ‘right’ scriptual frames to enable social and academic success (Luke 1993,
The present structure of trialling the multiple choice reading paper reinforces the status quo whereby those students who resist the dominant ideology are forced to remain in the bottom half of the student population.

**Differences in Gender**

The statistical results in the study regarding the different performances of male and female groups are misleading. Although female students performed marginally better overall, the best performers were clearly the Male A Group. All other students results, male and female were fairly similar. The bottom half of the female population performed better than the male population in the bottom half and this lifted the female results. This, coupled with the very poor performances of the Female A group and the males in the bottom half of the student population, resulted in both groups being much the same overall.

The differences in reading practices emerged in the methods the students used to select answers. Males clearly emerged as favouring an elimination method of dealing with the question/answer relationships, and although some females used this method, they tended to combine it with a contemplation method. Many females did not indicate verbally their method of making choices but their responses indicated they eliminated much less than the males in the study.

The males in the study appeared to take more risks with their answers which confirmed other theorists findings about gendered reading practices (Gilbert, 1989; Christian-Smith, 1993; Ben-Shakir and Sinai, 1991). These differences surfaced in the way they checked the text and the level of decisiveness of their responses. With the bottom half of the male population, the risks they took with their ideas indicated greater
confidence than the females in the study.

Females checked the text with much greater care and caution than males, and often checked their meanings more than once. Many of the male students checked the text very little, and when doing so were guided by the direct wording of the question.

The level of modality of the students’ answers revealed that males emerged with a higher level of decisiveness in their responses even when their answers were clearly incorrect. This category was only used to describe reading practices because although females indicated weaker modality overall, it did not reveal they were less successful in choosing correct answers when they were less decisive.

Summary

This study suggests that to be successful in a multiple choice reading test the reader must adopt the ‘right’ scriptual frames in order to achieve correct answers. The less alignment with the preferred reading of the item writers, the less chance a reader has of selecting the correct answers. This was demonstrated in so many of the students’ answers when they would achieve most of the correct answers for one passage and then perform poorly with another passage. It is difficult to believe that students with excellent metacognitive skills could perform so erratically, but it is conceivable, that their resistance to adopt the same scriptual frames as the item writers, led them to choose other alternatives. Although the metacognitive skills of many students appeared to be sound they served them poorly if their selection of a particular question/answer relationship did not align with the answers deemed correct by the item writers.
Limitations of the Study

Although limitations have been mentioned at various stages throughout this chapter they need to be collectively reinforced.

- This is a study of the reading practices of forty eight students. Although some generalisations can be made no consistent pattern emerged. It is quite possible, that although these results match results from the State examinations from which the passages were taken, another sampling of students could come up with a different set of results.

- In the analysis of this data my own ideological position about multiple choice testing needs to be acknowledged as does my social positioning as an individual.

- Being a female interviewer could have resulted in some of the male students in the lower half of the student population verbalising their ideas less comfortably during the interviews. It must be recognised that if perhaps the interviewer was male the responses might have been different.

- The affective domain although observed was not fully investigated as a part of the study. The way students felt on the day may have affected their responses. If they were given this test at another time of the day or on another day the results could have been different.

- The linguistic and metalinguistic competency of students could have affected what they were prepared to say at the interview and their ability to elaborate their
processes during the TOL discussions.

- The statistical analysis of the methods and strategies used and their success rate only revealed the success rate of individual methods and strategies in negotiating the question/answer relationships and therefore could not embody the interactive and interdependent use of methods and strategies by readers to make meaning.

- The chi square testing was done on a relatively small sample which has limitations in drawing conclusions about data.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

Firstly the findings of this study have demonstrated that the theory underpinning the syllabus for subject English does not match the theory of assessing comprehension using the multiple choice format. Current reading theories support the view that the positioning of individuals will influence the way in which a text is read. The implication of this finding suggests there needs to be agreement with the theoretical underpinnings of syllabus documents and assessment procedures.

Secondly, the findings of the study suggest that metacognitive theory needs to make some connection with the social domain of the reader. The data and the Literature Review have revealed that thought patterning itself is socially constructed, and therefore affects decisions readers make about texts.
Practical Implications

Firstly, the findings of the study suggest teachers are placed in teaching situations where they have to try to justify item writers' preferred readings of texts. This implication forces them to act against syllabus documentation which encourages them to teach students that texts have multiple meanings. By doing this they appear to teach to one theory in most of the teaching programme and then teach against this theory in preparing students for the multiple choice section of the examination. If they disagree overtly with the theory supporting assessment structures, they appear to be unsupportive of the educational institution which supports their occupations as teachers. In the classroom, students challenge the preferred readings of item writers as they are taught to question the dominant readings of texts and are encouraged to form their own critical views about what they read. When teachers insist that they may do this in all aspects of the course except in preparation for multiple choice reading tests, they are faced with confused students who also question their professional credibility.

Secondly, the mismatch between the theory and the syllabus creates situations where students with little access to privileged cultural knowledge are further entrenched into positions where they perform poorly in a test which is part of an examination which makes decisions about literacy. This lack of access to privileged cultural knowledge is seen as poor comprehension rather than exclusion from the social structures which would enable these students to connect to the 'right' scriptual frames in order to align meaning more closely with those who construct the test.
Future Directions and Recommendations

The future of the multiple choice reading test needs to be thoroughly examined. The syllabus from which teachers enact theory for teaching is moving towards guiding readers to see the multiple meanings available to them, which operate outside their own value systems. The lack of congruency between the multiple choice testing and the syllabus must be addressed in the near future to ensure students in classrooms preparing for examinations are not working against the theory they are being taught.

Multiple choice tests could be used as a teaching tool in the classroom, to read closely and identify the different ways of making meaning through questions and alternative responses, but it is limited as a testing tool for identifying both good and poor comprehenders. It only serves to rank students in a particular order with a certain set of items which privilege a particular way of thinking.

Teachers need to be more explicit about the theoretical paradigms which operate in texts so students are more aware of the different positions from which texts can be read. They also need to understand the context they create in their own classrooms which possibly privileges some readings over others. It would be important for them to acknowledge their dominant reading positions and also ensure students study other positions from which texts can be read.

Further investigation into students’ performance in low grades being attributed to lack of cultural access to knowledge rather than a lack of comprehension skills, would be most worthwhile. A wider group of students could be selected where there was also a questionnaire component built into the study to uncover more of a student’s social background. Until this is adequately addressed and acted upon, particular groups of
students will continue to remain in the bottom half of the student population when it comes to assessing critical literacy.

**Concluding Statement**

The results and discussion of this study indicate that accessing the right scriptual framing is the most important aspect of achieving well in multiple choice reading tests. Although methods of choice and metacognitive strategies were identified which could be practised by students in order to ensure they were more successful, there is no guarantee that the use of these methods and strategies by people who hold alternate values, will result in the same success as those who adopt the scriptual framing used by the item writers.

The recent decision in Western Australia to reduce the multiple choice reading test to twenty per cent rather than thirty five per cent must not be accepted as a compromise. Firstly, it does not seem sensible to provide a test which is based on one correct answer when the syllabus encourages students to be able to construct multiple readings of a text. Secondly, no matter how hard item writers try to ensure that question/answer relationships are free of multiple meanings, as this study demonstrates, the differing scriptual frames students bring to the text will always enable some students to make justifications and logical choices which are not deemed correct by the item writers. This reinforces situations where there will be those who are excluded from accessing the privileged meaning because their framing of the information that they are required to process is different from the preferred meanings of the item writers. This then places such students outside the perimeters of success with these comprehension tasks.
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August 1993

Dear,

I am currently undertaking research for my Master of Education degree at Edith Cowan University. Although I have your verbal approval to conduct interviews with eight Year 11 students, I am writing to you to confirm that I will conduct the interviews during October and November of this year. I have the cooperation of the English Department staff who are extremely supportive of my investigation of the processes students use when sitting a Multiple Choice Reading test.

I am in the process of detailing my intentions to the teacher concerned and the students who have expressed interest in participating in the study. A letter is also being sent to the guardians of these students to obtain formal approval of their involvement in the study. The data which I will collect will remain confidential to me, and your school and the students involved will be described anonymously.

I am extremely grateful for your support and look forward to receiving your formal consent in writing.

Yours sincerely,

Rosemary Naughton
Dear Parent,

My name is Rosemary Naughton. As a part of my Master of Education degree I will be undertaking research with Year 11 students at................................. Your child has expressed interest in being interviewed about the processes used by readers when sitting a Multiple Choice Reading test, but I need both your formal consent and your child's formal consent before conducting the interview.

In my current research I am interested in understanding how students negotiate the meaning of the texts in Multiple Choice Reading tests, because so many students appear to have problems in this area in the TEE examination. I wish to investigate whether the test is suitable for testing students' critical literacy and believe through examining the processes students use to make meaning, some conclusions will be able to be drawn regarding the suitability of the test.

As parents of the children in the study please be assured that all data will be anonymous and confidential. Would you and your child please fill in the attached slip giving your formal consent.

Yours sincerely,

Rosemary Naughton

I am willing to participate in the research project investigating the practices of Multiple Choice comprehension tests.

Signed.......................................................... Date..........................................................

Name..................................................................................................................................

I give my permission for....................................................... to participate in the research project investigating the reading practices of Multiple Choice comprehension tests.

Signed.......................................................... Date..........................................................
APPENDIX ITEM C

August 1993

Head of English Department

Dear .................................. .

Thank you for your verbal consent regarding participation in the research project investigating the reading practices of students sitting Multiple Choice Reading tests.

The proposed dates for the interviews will take place in October and November of this year. As agreed to on the phone regarding selection of students in the study, I am writing to you to confirm the expressions of interest of randomly selected students representative of the A, B, C and D grades in subject English. It is also important for the study that both gender are represented from these grades, therefore I will require four males and four females; each representing a particular grade in the subject.

I will require somewhere reasonably quiet in which to conduct the interviews and imagine each interview will take approximately ninety minutes. Students will be audio taped so their responses can later be transcribed and I will attempt to make the taping as unobtrusive as possible.

I wish to express my gratitude for your support for this study and assure you that your school and the data will remain anonymous and confidential. If students feel uncomfortable at any time throughout the interview they are free to discontinue with proceedings.

When students have been selected would you be able to send me a list of their names so I can send them the times of the interviews.

Looking forward to hearing from you soon

Yours sincerely

Rosemary Naughton
Dear __________________________

I was delighted to receive your formal approval and parent/guardian permission slip which means we can make plans to arrange a time and day for our interview.

________________________________________________________

has booked__________________________________________

on__________________________________________________

at____________________________________________________

It is really important you remember to come along at this time because I have only been allocated a short period of time in your school.

I am looking forward to meeting with you so we can discuss the Multiple Choice section of the T.E.E. English paper in more detail.

See you soon.

Yours sincerely

Rosemary Naughton
ENGLISH COMPREHENSION

SECTION THREE: QUESTIONS 23-35

Read the following passage and answer the questions which follow it.

TEACHING WHITES A LESSON

The following passage is taken from a contribution to a collection of essays on Aboriginal history published in Australia in 1988.

It is important that all Australians have some understanding of what the Aboriginal people's movement is about. You need to understand that our movement is no threat to your property: to your swimming pools or your flash buildings in town. And we Aboriginal people need you to understand it because, as far as I can see, we will not achieve what we want without support of others. Your society has too successfully subjugated us; we are now too weak, numerically, economically and socially to be able to win political battles on our own. The black movement, however, also has positive things to offer the white Australian community. You can do something for us, and we can do something for you. Aboriginal people in the last twenty years have shown the rest of society how to overcome some of the problems we all have in common. Aboriginal people set up the first women's refuges in this country. They also set up the first free legal-aid centres and the first community-controlled health and child-care centres. All of these new concepts have been adopted and adapted by other groups in the Australian community to meet their needs and overcome their problems. So Aboriginal people are showing and will continue to show other Australians the way to a better, more humanitarian society.

To understand what the land rights movement is all about you have to know a little about the true history of Australia. Most Australians know very little of it, because what they teach you in the schools bears very little relationship to the truth. When I went to school, about twenty years ago, all I was ever taught about my people was that we threw boomerangs and had woomeras, and that the Tasmanian Aborigines "died out". Nothing else we had done was worth mentioning.

Fortunately, in some areas, things are slowly beginning to change. You can see the difference in attitude among young non-Aboriginal Australians when they have been taught the truth. A few years ago I had the privilege of talking to a bunch of twelve-year-old non-Aboriginal Australians in the Melbourne suburb of Hawthorn who had done some Aboriginal studies over the previous two years, and I believe the political discussion I had with them was the most intelligent, logical and rational that I have ever had with any group of Australians. You only have to look at the Bruce Ruxtons, the Hugh Morgans and the Joh Bjelke-Petersens to see the other extreme. This is why I think that the real hope for the future rests with the young people, for they are beginning to be told a little of the truth of what happened in their country.
TEACHING WHITES A LESSON (Cont’d)

My comment that the hope for the future rests with the young people is deliberately ironic. For many years (and still today, in some parts of this country), there were people who said that there was no hope for older Aborigines, but that the young ones could be educated, especially if they were taken away from their parents and indoctrinated with white values. My argument is the opposite. I say that we should concentrate on teaching the young people the truth, so that they will change their attitudes and help create a better society for all of us.

Aboriginal people have been part of this continent for at least 50,000 years. It is only recently that the great white "experts", the self-proclaimed authorities on Aboriginal Australia, have acknowledged this, although Aboriginal people had always insisted they had been around for much longer than the archaeologists and anthropologists used to believe. Our oral history always told us that we'd been here a lot longer. Now the experts' research techniques have caught up with the teachings of Aboriginal oral culture. They are no longer telling people that Aborigines have only been living in Australia for 15,000 years and that we came across the land bridge from Asia before the end of the last Ice Age. In the 1970s, at Lake Mungo in the south-west of New South Wales, archaeologists found evidence of a burial site about 30,000 years old. This means that Aboriginal people had a relatively organised, sophisticated society long before anything that looked like civilisation had emerged in Europe.

It has been estimated that something like 800 million Aboriginal people lived and died in Australia B.C. – (Before Cook) – before any non-Aboriginal person set foot on this land. That must be difficult to comprehend for people whose history only goes back a couple of hundred years, for a couple of hundred years compared with over 50,000 years is nothing. This is one of the problems people have when the issue of sacred sites comes up. They don't understand that thousands of generations of Aboriginal people lived and died here, to the extent that virtually every square inch of this continent was of some significance to the Aboriginal people who lived here. It's not a question of Aboriginal people today, for convenience's sake, "discovering" a sacred site where some mining company has just found uranium or diamonds. Aboriginal people have radically different concepts of the land.

23. In the light of the passage as a whole, the title "Teaching Whites a Lesson" is most likely to mean

(a) that Aboriginal people should be compensated for the damage done to their society by Whites.
(b) that white Australians should listen to the opinions of Aboriginal people.
(c) that Aboriginal people are justified in their anger against White Australian society.
(d) that white Australians would benefit from the examples offered by Aboriginal people.
24. The first paragraph implies that the major distinction between white society and Aboriginal society is that

(a) white society values material wealth while Aboriginal society values social justice.
(b) white society is competitive while Aboriginal society is co-operative.
(c) white society believes in teaching facts, while Aboriginal society is concerned with teaching values.
(d) white society relies on technological expertise while Aboriginal society relies on myth and tradition.

25. The relationship between writer and audience established in the passage is best described as

(a) an Aboriginal activist addressing all young Australians.
(b) a white Australian sympathetic to the Aboriginal cause who is addressing other white Australians.
(c) an Aboriginal activist addressing white Australian society in general.
(d) an Aboriginal activist addressing people of his or her own race.

26. The tone of the first paragraph is best described as

(a) hostile.
(b) impassioned.
(c) conciliatory.
(d) provocative.

27. The last two paragraphs suggest that knowledge of the truth about Aboriginal history will

(a) promote a more balanced view of Australian history.
(b) help white Australians understand why land rights are so important to Aboriginal people.
(c) help to explain the anger and hostility of Aboriginal Australians.
(d) focus more attention on the pressing needs of Aboriginal people.
28. The sentence beginning "When I went to school..." (lines 19-22) is used to show how

(a) white historians have carefully avoided acknowledging the brutal treatment of Aborigines by white settlers.
(b) Aborigines have been represented as "primitive" in school text books.
(c) the positive contributions made by Aborigines have been ignored by historians.
(d) oversimplification, euphemism and silence have been used to misrepresent Aboriginal experience.

29. According to the third and fourth paragraphs hope for the future rests with the young people because they

(a) are capable of developing more positive attitudes once they learn the truth.
(b) are more intelligent and rational than their elders.
(c) are better educated than previous generations.
(d) have not yet been indoctrinated with white values.

30. The main function of the paragraph which begins "Aboriginal people have been part of this continent for at least 50,000 years" (line 40) is to

(a) show the superiority of Aboriginal oral culture over scientific expertise.
(b) establish the length and intensity of the Aboriginal people's relationship with the land.
(c) prove that Aboriginal culture predates European culture.
(d) dispute the theories of white experts on the origins of Aboriginal society.

31. The use of quotation marks around the phrases "died out" (line 21), "experts" (line 41) and "discovering" (line 60) implies that

(a) the writer endorses the view of events which these terms normally embody.
(b) the writer means the opposite of what is stated.
(c) the reader should not accept the use of these terms at face value.
(d) the ideas are derived from another source.
32. The use of the phrase "B.C." to refer to "Before Cook" (line 53) can best be read as

(a) supporting the view about the damage white settlement has done to Aboriginal culture.
(b) adding a note of ironic humour to the text.
(c) deliberately provoking the reader into a hostile response.
(d) implying that Australia was a paradise before European settlement.

33. Personal reference is used in the passage to

(a) position the audience to feel sympathy for the author's cause.
(b) generalise from personal experience and thus give validity to the views expressed.
(c) show that the article is based on opinion rather than fact.
(d) establish authenticity and give an individual perspective on a political situation.

34. The statement "Aboriginal people have radically different concepts of the land" (lines 61-62) refers to

(a) the all-pervading significance of the land for Aboriginal people as opposed to the short-term profit motives of whites.
(b) the great time-span of Aboriginal involvement with the land.
(c) the Aborigines' lack of interest in using the land for profit.
(d) the importance of the land in Aboriginal myth and ritual.

35. The passage is most likely to go on to

(a) criticise current education policies.
(b) argue the case for Aboriginal land rights.
(c) outline the true history of the Aboriginal people since white settlement.
(d) attack the materialistic values of white society.
ENGLISH COMPREHENSION

APPENDIX ITEM F

SECTION ONE: QUESTIONS 1-9

Read the following passage and answer the questions which follow it.

MR REGINALD PEACOCK'S DAY

This passage is the beginning of a short story of the same name, written by New Zealand author Katherine Mansfield in 1920.

If there was one thing that he hated more than another it was the way she had of waking him in the morning. It was her way of establishing her grievance of the day, and he was not going to let her know how successful it was. But really, really, to wake a sensitive person like that was positively dangerous! It took him hours to get over it — simply hours. She came into the room buttoned up in an overall, with a handkerchief over her head — thereby proving that she had been up herself and slaving since dawn — and called in a low, warning voice: "Reginald!"

"EH! What! What's that? What's the matter?"

"It's time to get up; it's half-past eight." And out she went, shutting the door quietly after her, to gloat over her triumph, he supposed.

He rolled over in the big bed, his heart still beating in quick, dull throbs, and with every throb he felt his energy escaping him, his — his inspiration for the day stifling under those thudding blows. It seemed that she took a malicious delight in making life more difficult for him than — Heaven knows — it was, by denying him his rights as an artist, by trying to drag him down to her level. What was the matter with her? What the hell did she want? Hadn't he three times as many pupils now as when they were first married, earned three times as much, paid for every stick and stone that they possessed, and was she beginning to shell out for Adrian's kindergarten? ... And had he ever reproached her for not having a penny to her name? Never a word — never a sign! The truth was that once you married a woman she became insatiable, and the truth was that nothing was more fatal for an artist than marriage, at any rate until he was well over forty ... Why had he married her? He asked himself this question on an average about three times a day, but he never could answer it satisfactorily. She had caught him at a weak moment, when the first plunge into reality had bewildered and overwhelmed him for a time. Looking back, he saw a pathetic, youthful creature, half child, half wild untamed bird, totally incompetent to cope with bills and creditors and all the sordid details of existence. Well — she had done her best to chip his wings, if that was any satisfaction for her, and she could congratulate herself on the success of this early morning trick. One ought to wake exquisitely, reluctantly, he thought, slipping down in the warm bed. He began to imagine a series of enchanting scenes which ended with his latest, most charming pupil putting her bare, scented arms round his neck and covering him with her long, perfumed hair. "Awake, my love!" ...

SEE PAGE 5
As was his daily habit, while the bath water ran, Reginald Peacock tried his voice.

"When her mother tends her before the laughing mirror, 
Looping up her laces, tying her hair,"

he sang, softly at first listening to the quality, nursing his voice until he came to the third line:

"Often she thinks, were this wild thing wedded ..."

and upon the word "wedded" he burst into such a shout of triumph that the tooth-glass on the bathroom shelf trembled and even the bath tap seemed to gush stormy applause ...

Well, there was nothing wrong with his voice, he thought, leaping into the bath and soaping his soft, pink body all over with a loofah shaped like a fish. He could fill Covent Garden with it! "Wedded," he shouted again, seizing the towel with a magnificent operatic gesture, and went on singing while he rubbed as though he had been Lohengrin tipped out by an unwary Swan and drying himself in the greatest haste before that tiresome Elsa came along, along ...

1. The main source of irony in the passage is the contrast between
   (a) Reginald's certainty of his own perfection and the reader's awareness of his faults and limitations.
   (b) Reginald's smug idleness and his wife's industry.
   (c) Reginald's view of himself and that his wife must have of him.
   (d) Reginald's dreams of being a great artist and his banal surroundings.

2. The passage implies that Reginald sees himself as
   (a) an unworldly man who cannot cope with the practical details of life.
   (b) a sensitive man whose wife is totally unsympathetic to his needs.
   (c) a great artist constrained by a mundane and sordid marriage.
   (d) a noble man who has made great personal sacrifices for his wife and family.
3. The passage suggests that Reginald views his wife's housekeeping activities as

(a) strategies for drawing attention to herself in an attempt to gain sympathy.
(b) an inconvenience, but necessary to the pursuit of his career.
(c) an irritation which he must endure.
(d) malicious attempts to provoke and humiliate him.

4. "What the hell did she want ... never a sign!" (lines 15-19) imply that

(a) Reginald has ambitions to be wealthy.
(b) Reginald resents having to pay anything to support his wife and child.
(c) Reginald is conscious of the sacrifices he has made for his family.
(d) Reginald is proud of the material progress he had made.

5. The word "insatiable" (line 20) is used in the passage to mean

(a) greedy.
(b) impossible to satisfy.
(c) dull and unromantic.
(d) ungrateful.

6. Reginald's image of himself as "half child, half wild untamed bird" (lines 25-26) implies that he

(a) wishes he could be freed from his family obligations.
(b) believes someone else should take responsibility for him.
(c) sees himself as vulnerable and helpless.
(d) sees himself as a free, innocent creature trapped into domesticity.

7. The lines "the tooth-glass on the bathroom shelf trembled and even the bath tap seemed to gush stormy applause" (lines 39-41)

(a) emphasise Reginald's awareness of the banality of his surroundings.
(b) evoke the emotive power of Reginald Peacock's voice.
(c) show how Reginald's egotism transforms even inanimate objects into an appreciative audience.
(d) foreshadow the success of Reginald's performance later in the story.
8. The line "soaping his soft, pink body all over with a loofah shaped like a fish" (line 43) is used to

(a) contrast Reginald's physical softness with the power of his voice.
(b) make Reginald appear less masculine.
(c) emphasise Reginald's health and vigour.
(d) make Reginald appear faintly ridiculous.

9. The passage implies that the main features of Reginald's character are

(a) vanity and self-centredness.
(b) pride and self-satisfaction.
(c) smugness and superiority.
(d) snobbishness and resentment.

END OF SECTION ONE

NOTE: SECTION TWO COMMENCES ON PAGE 8
Soon it will be fifty years since the Zeppelinfeld outside Nuremberg played host to its first full-scale Nazi rally with décor and choreography by Albert Speer. There is enough left of the tribunes and stands around the parade area to give you some idea of its original proportions, even though the great stone swastikas, eagles and colonnades and their marble veneers were all blown up in 1945. The place looks a bit like Stonehenge, except the circle has been squared, and thankfully, flattened.

If you take the No. 6 tram out of Nuremberg, change at the Meistersingerhalle to a No. 55 bus and get off at the next stop after a very large totalitarian-looking horseshoe-shaped building which nobody will say was once the Kongresshalle, you can walk back 100 yards, make a dog-leg to the left and be standing alone where 90,000 Nazis used to stand in line yelling while another 150,000 Nazis in the grandstands yelled back at them, and Hitler himself, on the podium which is still intact, yelled louder than anybody. It was an amplified uproar in a blaze of light. But nothing happens now except a few lonely madmen scrawling graffiti by night, the inevitable Japanese tourists taking photographs of one another, American service personnel playing football, and the quiet, the blessedly quiet, passing of time.

The place used to attain its full evil glory after dark, Nazism being essentially a thing of night-time and the forest. Walled in by giant swastika banners, the square was open at the top to the night sky. Then the searchlights would be switched on. Spaced closely and evenly right around the outside of the ramparts and pointing vertically, they sent their beams straight up to form a Lichdom, a cathedral of light five miles high. In his memoirs Speer says he got the idea just before the 1934 Parteitag, but typically he is rearranging the facts. He pioneered the notion at the Hamelin rally the year before. At Hamelin, however, he had only ordinary theatrical floodlights to play with: it was the searchlights which gave a Nuremberg rally its dubious title to being the apotheosis of Versammlungsarchitektur — Speer's term for the architecture that brought people together.

When the Nazis got together on the Zeppelinfeld, Hitler appeared on the podium so that they could all aim their right armpits at him. I appeared on the same podium and tried to imagine how it must have felt. Like most television performers I am accustomed to being told by confident pundits that I am engaged in a form of demagoguery, with a mass audience as the more or less willing victim. But in fact the mass audience is confined to the studio and usually consists of four cameramen plus two floor-managers and a group of scene-shifters reading Penthouse.
The television audience sits at home and consists of a lot of individuals. A mass is the last thing it is. At Nuremberg, Hitler's audience was all there together in one lump — a mass was the first thing it was. I did not feel inclined to address its phantom. There was nothing out there on the wet grass except crows feeding on the scraps left after a football game.

Beyond the back entrance at the other end of the arena, the pine forest still stretches away, the dark green trees out of which the brown poison seeped and into which it was eventually driven back. The thought of all those brick-red yelling faces is chilling even when you consider that a rally was the only time when the Nazis weren't actually engaged in hurting anybody. Besides, the consideration would be not quite true. Nuremberg was Streicher's personal city and even while he was playing host to the Führer his standover men were active all over town, kicking, whipping, torturing and always shouting, shouting, shouting.

24. The selection of detail in the first paragraph emphasises the contrast between

(a) the passing of time and the endurance of physical structures.
(b) the former importance of the Zeppelinfeld and its current state of disrepair.
(c) the noise of the Nazi rallies and the silence of the current visitors.
(d) the violence of Nazism and the peacefulness of the present.

25. The directions in paragraph 2 on how to find the Zeppelinfeld

(a) emphasise that it is out of the way and neglected.
(b) suggest a confusing and difficult route.
(c) reinforce the idea that it is worth going out of one's way to see the ruins.
(d) evoke the underhandedness and oppression associated with Nazism.

26. The lines "a very large totalitarian-looking horseshoe-shaped building which nobody will say was once the Kongresshalle" (lines 8-9) imply that

(a) the local people are hostile to tourists.
(b) many people do not want to acknowledge the Nazi past.
(c) the monuments of Nazism have been neglected and forgotten.
(d) people are ashamed of the ugly and oppressive-looking architecture of their town.

SEE PAGE 14
27. The main patterns of imagery which the passage uses to evoke the public ritual of Nazism are the

(a) allusions to madness and violence.
(b) metaphors of evil and oppression.
(c) references to darkness and isolation.
(d) theatrical effects created by light and noise.

8. The reference to the passing of time as "blessedly quiet" (line 16)

(a) provides a contrast with the "amplified uproar" of Nazi behaviour.
(b) highlights the loneliness and desolation of the place now.
(c) suggests people's relief at being freed from Nazi tyranny.
(d) conveys the author's pleasure at finding a historic site which is not overrun with tourists.

9. According to the passage, the major difference between a television performance and a Nazi rally is that the

(a) television performance offers greater opportunities for demagoguery than the rally.
(b) television audience is passive while the rally audience is actively involved.
(c) members of a television audience are physically separated unlike the members of a rally audience.
(d) television performance offers less opportunity for audience response than the rally.

10. The phrases "Nazism being essentially a thing of night-time and the forest" (lines 17-18) and "the dark green trees out of which the brown poison seeped" (line 41) discuss Nazism as if it

(a) was a revival of a pre-civilised form of behaviour.
(b) was strongly associated with nature and the countryside.
(c) originated in the less settled parts of Germany.
(d) manifested itself in violence and war-mongering.
31. The title of the passage implies that
   (a) the German people are ashamed of this aspect of their past and should be allowed to forget it.
   (b) important historical sites are being neglected and allowed to fall into ruin.
   (c) ruins which are associated with evil and oppression have little value and are best forgotten.
   (d) the author can see no real point in tourists visiting the Zeppelinfeld.

32. Which of the following best describes the change in the tone of the passage which occurs between paragraphs 3 and 4?
   (a) From neutral to sympathetic.
   (b) From objective to subjective.
   (c) From descriptive to reflective.
   (d) From historical to argumentative.

33. The fourth and fifth paragraphs suggest an attempt to
   (a) identify the author's occupation with Hitler's.
   (b) distance the author's occupation from Hitler's.
   (c) explain the author's sense of the repulsiveness of Hitler.
   (d) understand the attraction of Hitler.

34. The sentence "I did not feel inclined to address its phantom" (lines 37-38) implies that the author is
   (a) uneasy with the analogies between his role as television presenter and that of a demagogue such as Hitler.
   (b) wearied by his visit and wishes to leave as quickly as possible.
   (c) aware of the futility of trying to recapture the past.
   (d) disillusioned by the emptiness and desolation of his surroundings.

35. The last sentence "Nuremberg was Streicher's personal city ... " (lines 45-47) implies that
   (a) the silence of the present covers the shouting of the past.
   (b) Hitler was unaware of the actions of Streicher's men.
   (c) Nazi behaviour was out of control.
   (d) the fanaticism of the rallies had violent consequences.

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## APPENDIX ITEM K

### SECONDARY EDUCATION AUTHORITY

### STATEWIDE ANALYSIS 1990

#### PART 2: STATE-WIDE DISTRACTOR ANALYSIS

The following table shows, for each item,

(i) the percentage of students from across the State who have correctly to the item ('Percent Correct')

(ii) the correct option ('Key')

(iii) the number of students selecting each option ('A, B, C, D, E')

(iv) the number of students who have not attempted the item ('No. CORRECT A')

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APPENDIX ITEM L

SECONDARY EDUCATION AUTHORITY

STATEWIDE ANALYSIS 1991

PART 2: STATE-WIDE DISTRACTOR ANALYSIS

The following table shows for each item:

(i) the percentage of students from across the State who have correctly to the item ("Percent Correct")
(ii) the correct option ("Key")
(iii) the number of students selecting each option ("A, B, C, E")
(iv) the number of students who have not attempted the item ("")

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### APPENDIX ITEM M

**SECONDARY EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

#### STATEWIDE ANALYSIS 1992

**PART 2: STATE-WIDE DISTRACTOR ANALYSIS**

The following table shows, for each item:

1. The percentage of students from across the State who have responded correctly to the item ('Percent Correct')
2. The correct option ('Key')
3. The number of students selecting each option ('A/B/C/D/E'); and
4. The number of students who have not attempted the item ('*')

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1990 Passage

TEACHING WHITES A LESSON

QUESTIONS 23 - 35

23. In the light of the passage as a whole, the title "Teaching Whites a Lesson" is most likely to mean

(a) that Aboriginal people should be compensated for the damage done to their society by Whites.
(b) that white Australians should listen to the opinions of Aboriginal people.
(c) that Aboriginal people are justified in their anger against White Australian society.
(d) that white Australians would benefit from the examples offered by Aboriginal people.

ANSWER A B C D

because throughout the passage it shows that Aborigines have been frustrated and not treated well by White Australians. A lot of the concepts they have have been adopted by Whites. A E B C D could be it - little. They should listen to their opinions and would benefit from the examples. A Wall light but it isn't really about

24. The first paragraph implies that the major distinction between white society and Aboriginal society is that

(a) white society values material wealth while Aboriginal society values social justice
(b) white society is competitive while Aboriginal society is co-operative.
(c) white society believes in teaching facts, while Aboriginal society is concerned with teaching values.
(d) white society relies on technological expertise while Aboriginal society relies on myth and tradition.

ANSWER A}

I don't think any of these - all relevant but none are the best. Answer: White society values material wealth. "We are not here to be property." Would there as much as evidence? But they are not just on about the facts - they are trying the Aborigines to show what has been done to Aborigines in Tasmania. I'm not comfortable with